

**MORAL RELIGION:
THE LATER RICOEUR'S HERMENEUTICS
OF ETHICAL LIFE**

James Carter,

Regent's Park College, University of Oxford

DPhil Thesis in Theology, Trinity Term 2011

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Short Abstract

This thesis engages with the later writings of Paul Ricoeur in order to understand his philosophy as a whole. A reconstruction of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of ethical life presents his significant contribution to contemporary philosophy of religion. This hermeneutics aims to elucidate a moral religion that binds humans together universally on the basis of the life they share as capable beings. To facilitate this hermeneutics, I will demonstrate that a selective reading of Ricoeur's philosophy brings to light the pivotal role of his 'little ethics' in bridging his later and earlier works. The capable human (*l'homme capable*) in the later Ricoeur must be understood in relation to both the 'little ethics' and an architectonic of moral religion.

Elucidating the aim (*telos*) of ethical life and the norm ('moral law') of moral religion from the 'little ethics' points to the significant roles of Aristotle and Kant in Ricoeur's architectonic. Ricoeur himself defines 'architectonic' in Kantian terms as a critical framework, while appropriating Spinoza's metaphysical conception of a rational striving (*conatus*) for life in its fullness. Core concepts taken from Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant are implicit in the present reconstruction of Ricoeur's hermeneutics. Three dimensions of ethical life emerge in Spinoza's metaphysics, Aristotle's anthropology, and Kant's moral philosophy, giving us Ricoeur's architectonic.

For Ricoeur, the ethical aim is grounded on a metaphysics of human capability, and the demanding nature of 'the law' renders religion moral. This religion assumes that the good life is the goal of human striving. But crucially, the thesis will uncover 'the arrow of the religious' (*la flèche du religieux*) as it motivates the capable subject to embrace life with and for others in just institutions. In conclusion, life is revealed as the heart of Ricoeur's moral religion.

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Long Abstract

This thesis argues that a reconstruction of Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics of ethical life will show his significant contribution to contemporary philosophy of religion. This hermeneutics aims to elucidate a moral religion that binds humans together universally on the basis of what they share as capable beings. To facilitate this hermeneutics, I will demonstrate that a selective reading of Ricoeur's philosophy brings to light the pivotal role of his 'little ethics' in bridging his later and earlier works. The concept of the capable human (*l'homme capable*) first appears in Ricoeur's thinking at the end of the 1990s, and is best understood in relation to both his 'little ethics' and an architectonic of moral religion.

To support my argument, I engage with Ricoeur's later writings in order to understand his philosophy as a whole. What emerges from this retrospective reading of Ricoeur is a hitherto unforeseen thread concerning ethical life, pulled through his own readings of Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant. This crucial thread can be traced from Ricoeur's early philosophy of the will to his final essays and interviews.

Elucidating the aim (*telos*) of ethical life and the norm ('moral law') of moral religion from the 'little ethics' points to the significant roles of Aristotle and Kant in Ricoeur's architectonic. Ricoeur himself defines 'architectonic' in Kantian terms as a critical framework of core concepts. To Aristotle and Kant, Ricoeur adds an appropriation of Spinoza's crucial metaphysical conception of a rational striving (*conatus*) for life in its fullness. Core concepts taken from Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant give a structure to the present reconstruction of Ricoeur's hermeneutics. Interpreting key elements of Spinoza's metaphysics, Aristotle's anthropology, and of Kant's moral philosophy generates the three dimensions of Ricoeur's architectonic.

Ricoeur brings to light the strong rationalist thread running through Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant, *in that order*. The thesis begins with Spinoza's metaphysics, before traversing the levels of Aristotle's anthropology and Kant's moral philosophy. Crucially, reason as it is employed by all three philosophers is not understood merely as some transcendent faculty; rather, with Ricoeur, reason is a practical *capability* shared by every human being. Ricoeur asserts that to be human is to be fundamentally capable, and that the rational nature of capability enables human subjects to increase in understanding, ultimately aiming at the joyful recognition of themselves as part of the wider whole of life. Crucially, 'life', as it is presented in this thesis, is understood both as lived human experience, and as reality in its broadest sense, i.e., the whole of which we are all a part. This whole encompasses lived human experience. For Ricoeur, it is life which binds us together as capable human beings. A vision of human capability requires recognition of the shared status of human subjects as components and expressions of metaphysical, anthropological and moral life.

For Ricoeur, the ethical aim of moral religion is grounded on a metaphysics of human capability, and the demanding nature of the Kantian 'law' renders religion moral. This religion assumes that the good life is the goal of human striving. It is a religion based on human reason, and on the human subject as a rational and political animal. The human conduct with and for others is governed by a moral norm to which she subjects herself and through which she interprets her pursuit of the good life. In fact, Ricoeur draws crucially on Spinoza and Aristotle to modify the Kantian rationalism supporting this moral norm. This modification produces an acute understanding of human subjects not simply as autonomous rational actors, but also as vulnerable acting and suffering selves who depend upon others in exactly the same manner that others depend upon them.

The unifying vision of ethical life which supports Ricoeur's religion is informed by a reflexive hermeneutics, which elucidates the embeddedness of each and every human being. Ricoeur's reflexive account of selfhood assumes, if not contends, that each self is inextricably embedded in relations with those around her. This embeddedness is a constitutive aspect of human being. But crucially, this thesis will uncover 'the arrow of the religious' (*la flèche du religieux*)

as it motivates the capable subject to embrace life with and for others in just institutions. This image of the arrow represents the human pursuit of the good life as shot through by the religious. The human is conceived not as the passive recipient of the 'gift' of life, but rather in Spinozist terms as the active agent of increasing understanding. The culmination of this agent's activity is the joyful recognition of oneself as inextricably bound up in the whole of life.

Three interrelated tasks are implicit in the exegetical, restorative and critical aims of this thesis. First, the exegesis in the thesis teases out Ricoeur's appropriations of Spinoza's *conatus* for his metaphysical concept of capability, of Aristotle's account of human vulnerability for his anthropology of human capacities, and of Kant's categorical imperative for the moral norm which governs the human pursuit of the good life.

Second, the restorative aim of the thesis builds a substantial architectonic from the exegesis of the first aim of the thesis. This architectonic of moral religion is held together by Ricoeur's interpretation of religion as metaphysical life in Spinoza, of religion as anthropological life in Aristotle, and of religion as moral life in Kant.

Third, the critical aim of the thesis is to assess the coherence of this architectonic. This critical assessment will raise substantive questions concerning the consistency of the core concepts from Ricoeur's hermeneutical selection of rationalist philosophers.

The three interrelated aims of exegesis, restoration and critique inform three explicit claims. The first claim is that Ricoeur's rationalist architectonic enables readers to interpret his philosophy as a moral religion. The critical framework of metaphysical, anthropological and moral life supports the three dimensions of Ricoeur's moral religion.

The second claim of the thesis is that this architectonic is rendered religious by the reflexive autonomy of Ricoeur. A *reflexivity-conviction* appears to underpin Ricoeur's hermeneutics of ethical life. Remarkably, a reflexive self is traceable through Ricoeur's entire philosophical corpus. The aforementioned reflexivity-conviction is grounded on the conviction that being oneself inasmuch as other (*soi-même comme un autre*) involves both acting and suffering. The result is a reflexive account of the self as inextricably embedded both among others and within the

whole. This embeddedness of the human being provides the necessary ground for Ricoeur's architectonic.

The third claim of the thesis is that Ricoeur's moral religion offers a bold and timely vision for contemporary philosophy of religion. It blends a Kantian conception of an 'ethical commonwealth' rooted in respect for the lives of each rational being as ends-in-themselves with a Spinozist conception of an ethical desire to increase in every human activity as inextricable and irreplaceable parts of the wider whole of life.

To conclude, this thesis reconstructs Ricoeur's hermeneutical method, which both uncovers and builds an architectonic of moral religion. The hermeneutics elucidates the religious motivation immanent in the human desire to be and effort to exist. This motivation drives a rational striving towards the good life, with and for others in just institutions. To paraphrase Ricoeur: 'What counts is the fact that we are an individual part of a great whole. But this individual does not recognise itself as a part at the beginning, but only at the end of its journey' (cf. Ricoeur 1999: 44-45). Humans are united as capable beings who are given life, develop, come to fullness of life and to the end of life. For Ricoeur, these dimensions of life are not only ethically valuable, but are the heart of moral religion.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND REFERENCES

Ricoeur Unless otherwise stated, all citations will be to English translations of Ricoeur. Where an English translation is unavailable, the translation is my own. In addition, certain works of Ricoeur's will be referred to using the following abbreviations:

FN *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*

FM *Fallible Man*

SE *The Symbolism of Evil*

FP *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*

TN *Time and Narrative (Volumes I, II or III)*

OA *Oneself as Another*

MHF *Memory, History, Forgetting*

RJ *Reflections on The Just*

AV 'Autonomy and Vulnerability'

Spinoza Unless otherwise stated, all citations of Spinoza are to Edwin Curley's translation of the *Ethics* (1996). I use the following abbreviations for the *Ethics*: 'Ip33s2' names Part I, Prop.33, Schol.2, and so forth; 'IId1' names Part II, Definition 1, and so forth. 'Ia1' names Part I, Axiom 1, and so forth.

Aristotle All unaccompanied citations of Aristotle are to Christopher Rowe's (2002) translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE). References are to lines in the Greek text.

Kant All citations will be to English translations of Kant's work. However, page references will be to the German *Akademie* edition, except in the case of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where they will be to the A and B editions. In addition, the following abbreviations will be used when referring to Kant's works.

<i>C1</i>	<i>Critique of Pure Reason</i>
<i>C2</i>	<i>Critique of Practical Reason</i>
<i>C3</i>	<i>Critique of the Power of Judgment</i>
<i>G</i>	<i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i>
<i>R</i>	<i>Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason</i>
<i>DV</i>	<i>The Doctrine of Virtue</i>
<i>Anth.</i>	<i>Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View</i>

For full bibliographical details of all the above references, see the bibliography.

INTRODUCTION

RICOEUR'S ARCHITECTONIC OF MORAL RELIGION

'C'est en mon désir d'être, dans mon pouvoir d'exister, que la flèche du religieux vient m'atteindre.'

(Ricoeur 2000a: 207-8)

(It is in my desire to be, in my effort to exist, that I am struck by the arrow of the religious.)¹

1. The Argument of the Thesis

1.1 Opening Remarks

This thesis argues that the later philosophical² writings of Paul Ricoeur provide a highly instructive interpretative key with which to assess his broader philosophical project. The thesis offers a critical but sympathetic reconstruction of Ricoeur's project as a 'religion' of human capability. What will emerge from this reconstruction is a 'hermeneutics of ethical life' which aims to establish a moral religion that binds humans together universally on the basis of what they share as capable beings.

¹ My translation. For a recent alternative translation of this piece, see Treanor & Venema (eds.) 2010: 27-40.

² This thesis is concerned with the religious significance of Ricoeur's *philosophical* writings. It does not engage with Ricoeur's theological writings, which I take to constitute a separate, distinct body of work. It is for this reason that the thesis rejects claims that the later Ricoeur's expressed interest in religion marks an explicitly Christian, theological turn (see section 2.5, below). Ricoeur has produced a number of texts that deal with explicitly Christian themes, to which I direct readers who wish to explore Ricoeur's contribution to Christian theology (see, for example, Ricoeur 1980). By contrast, Ricoeur's *philosophical* writings bracket all questions of biblical faith. Even if, as will be discovered below, the later Ricoeur is more prepared than he was in the past to confront religious questions, he will continue to explore those questions *philosophically*. In sum, this thesis interprets the later Ricoeur not as a theologian, but as a *philosopher of religion* interested in philosophically exploring universal questions of religious significance. Ricoeur's complete archives, including bibliographies, major themes and unpublished essays, lectures and notes, are now available at the Fonds Ricoeur in Paris, and can be accessed online at: <http://www.fondsriceur.fr>

To support this argument, I wish to demonstrate that a significant and consistent reading of Ricoeur can be achieved by scrutinising his philosophical corpus in light of a moral religion. This reading will be significant for two reasons. First, it will bring to light a hitherto unforeseen thread in Ricoeur's writings that lends his project as a whole a remarkable consistency. This thread will be found in the often implicit but nevertheless formative influences of Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant *together* that can be traced from the early philosophy of the will to his final essays and interviews.³

Second, elucidating those core ideas from Aristotle, Spinoza and Kant which shape Ricoeur's moral religion marks a major departure from recent Ricoeur scholarship. There have been notable attempts to identify Aristotelian⁴, Kantian⁵ and, more recently, Spinozist⁶ themes in Ricoeur's work. This thesis follows previous critical reconstructions of Ricoeur's philosophical project which argue that his thought remains – right up to his death – broadly Kantian, both in its structure and its aim.⁷ What distinguishes the thesis is the original project of engaging with the later Ricoeur in order to draw from his broader corpus retrospectively a threefold *architectonic* informed by Spinoza, Aristotle, and Kant.

Before proceeding further, 'architectonic' merits explanation. This term appears most famously in Kant's philosophy, where it designates a system which progresses from the most formal to the most concrete. Ricoeur's 'architectonic', therefore, refers to the *structure* of the framework which brings Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant together, beginning at the level of metaphysics (Spinoza), proceeding to anthropology (Aristotle) and finally to

³ See note 15, below.

⁴ See, for example, Kemp 1989.

⁵ See, for example, Anderson 1993.

⁶ See, for example, Kearney 2010a, who remarks upon the presence of Spinoza in Ricoeur's final writings. I depart from Kearney in arguing that themes from Spinoza's metaphysics lie at the core of *all* of Ricoeur's philosophical thinking. For further differences between this thesis and Kearney's writings on Ricoeur, see section 2 of the Postscript.

⁷ For a critical reconstruction of Ricoeur along Kantian lines, see Anderson 1993.

morality (Kant). Additionally, the term also serves to locate Ricoeur in the tradition of a more rationalist and systematic kind of philosophy than that practiced by many of his contemporaries, particularly in the English-speaking world.⁸ Ricoeur belongs to a long tradition of French philosophers educated to read philosophy historically, and to approach particular philosophical problems in terms of their historical development.⁹ It is therefore quite likely that Ricoeur understood contemporary deliberations on ethical life and religion to be shaped by historical predecessors among whom the rationalist tradition includes Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant. This historical influence is most evident in the rationalist nature of Ricoeur's hermeneutics, which is governed first and foremost by a sense of both the power and the limits of human reason, but also by the overall systematic sense of Ricoeur's thinking. This rationalism distinguishes Ricoeur's philosophical method from the more existential philosophies of many of his contemporaries, including Sartre, Marcel, and Merleau-Ponty.¹⁰

At this stage, a crucial distinction must also be established. The thesis will refer to both Ricoeur's 'architectonic' and his 'hermeneutics'. These two terms must not be confused. Architectonic refers to the structure of Ricoeur's philosophical framework, as

⁸ Despite being written almost thirty years ago, Alan Montefiore's cautious assessment of the fundamental differences between French and 'Anglo-Saxon' philosophy remains timely. See Montefiore 1983: vii-xxvi.

⁹ For a survey of mainstream French philosophy from the inter-war years to the 1980s, see Descombes 1981.

¹⁰ Obviously Sartre, Marcel and Merleau-Ponty are three philosophers who in many respects have very little in common. Indeed, to associate all three of them with a term as contestable as 'existentialist' is not in itself uncontroversial. What they *do* share, which I take to be distinct from Ricoeur's rationalist approach, is a sustained focus on felt, *subjective* experience that precludes any broader, systematic architectonic like that which this thesis attributes to Ricoeur. Subjective experience is clearly of interest to Ricoeur too, as *Freedom and Nature's* phenomenological account of human willing demonstrates (see *FN*). And to the degree that there are some overlaps between Ricoeur and these existentialists, they can be traced to a shared interest in the legacy of Husserlian phenomenology. However, Ricoeur departs from these existentialists in his attempt to situate his studies of felt, subjective experience within a broader philosophical account of life which includes objective structures of consciousness.

presented in this thesis; hermeneutics refers to his philosophical method.¹¹ Yet equally, the two terms are intimately connected. Ricoeur's hermeneutic approach to philosophical problems and philosophical texts leads him to establish an architectonic informed by Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant. Conversely, the architectonic subsequently guides Ricoeur's hermeneutic engagement with particular philosophical themes in order to establish a moral religion.

1.2 The Aims of the Thesis

There are three implicit, interrelated aims – exegetical, restorative and critical – which guide the present reconstruction of Ricoeur's project as an architectonic of moral religion. First, the exegesis in the thesis elucidates those aspects of Ricoeur's thought which reflect Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant. Second, the restorative aim of the thesis is to derive a substantial architectonic from this exegesis. Third, the critical aim of the thesis is to assess the plausibility of this architectonic. This assessment will raise critical questions concerning the consistency and coherence of Ricoeur's hermeneutical method. Notwithstanding the question of the compatibility of Aristotle, Spinoza and Kant on ethical life, additional questions arise concerning: i) Ricoeur's own (however implicit) Kantian commitments, and the compatibility of these commitments with his reading Spinoza and Aristotle; and (ii) the overall coherence of Ricoeur's architectonic. Other, more general questions, concerning the nature of hermeneutic philosophy, will also arise in the chapters that follow.

¹¹ It is not easy to offer a precise definition of Ricoeur's hermeneutics. Ricoeur's works written since *The Symbolism of Evil* have addressed themselves to numerous aspects of hermeneutics; so a definition which is too specific would not do justice to these various works (Anderson 1993: 3n12; cf. *SE*). However, Ricoeur's essay 'On Interpretation' usefully presents his own reflection back upon the progression of his thought, including his 'hermeneutical phenomenology' and his shift from interpreting written texts only to actions (Ricoeur 1991; Anderson 1993: 3n12).

1.3 The Claims of the Thesis

The three interrelated aims inform three explicit claims. The first claim is that Ricoeur's rationalist architectonic enables readers to interpret his philosophy as a moral religion. The second claim is that this architectonic is rendered religious by a reflexive understanding of autonomy, or *reflexivity-conviction*, which underpins Ricoeur's hermeneutics of ethical life; and that the reflexive self can be traced through his entire philosophical corpus. The third claim is that Ricoeur's moral religion offers a bold and timely vision for contemporary philosophy of religion. It blends a Kantian conception of an 'ethical commonwealth' (R 6:97) rooted in respect for individual lives as rational ends-in-themselves with a Spinozist conception of an ethical desire to increase in one's activity as an inextricable and irreplaceable part of the wider whole (cf. Ricoeur 1999: 44-46).¹² The result is a vision of capable human beings actively embracing life both among one another and in the whole.

*

In this thesis, the terms 'God', 'Nature', and 'Life' will be used interchangeably in referring to the wider whole of which we are a part. This 'God' or 'Nature', as Spinoza puts it, will be a focus of chapter 1. Moreover, the connection of 'God' or 'Nature' to 'Life' will be explored in the same chapter as a crucial dimension of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of ethical life. As the thesis progresses, the emphasis will be placed increasingly on Life: both 'life', with a lower case, which designates lived human experience, and 'Life', with an upper case, which designates the wider whole of which we are all a part, and which encompasses lived human experience. For Ricoeur, it is this Life which binds us together as capable human

¹² Referring back to the quotation at the beginning of this chapter, it is clear that Ricoeur's 'desire to be and effort to exist' have both Spinozist overtones and Kantian undertones. The significance of this particular quotation will be made clear in section 2.1, below.

beings. This vision requires recognition of the shared status of human subjects as components and expressions of Life, in its metaphysical, anthropological and moral dimensions.

*

As a final observation in this preliminary sketch, it should be noted that Ricoeur's moral religion as presented here departs from the standard debates which continue to dominate analytic philosophy of religion.¹³ The continued prominence of these debates, particularly concerning the logical analysis of theological concepts, has been especially evident recently in the remarkable extension of the movement to 'analytic theology', which seeks to apply the methodological tools of analytic philosophy of religion to Christian theology.¹⁴ In contrast to the claims and debates central to analytic theology in particular, and analytic philosophy of religion generally, this thesis turns to Ricoeur in order to ground philosophy of religion not exclusively in the analysis of concepts (valuable though that is), but in a hermeneutic analysis of ethical life that can shape a moral religion.

This first section has given a preliminary sketch of the overall argument presented in the thesis. The remainder of the chapter introduces the key concepts and specific arguments for Ricoeur's moral religion. The second section outlines the distinctive features of the later Ricoeur's thought, explaining their significance for the thesis as a whole. The third

¹³ See Wainwright (2005), Crisp & Rea (eds.) (2009), Rea (ed.) (2009).

¹⁴ For a summary of recent literature in analytic theology, see William Wood (2009). The rise of analytic theology raises significant questions about the relationship between philosophy of religion, on the one hand, and theology or philosophical theology on the other. For the writers who identify themselves as analytic theologians are overwhelmingly trained in analytic philosophy of religion, with little or no formal background or training in Christian doctrine or systematic theology. And yet, in writing about 'analytic theology', they claim to be practicing what they call philosophical theology, and thereby identify themselves as analytic theologians *in addition to* their longstanding identifications as analytic philosophers of religion. This of course raises the further question as to how one defines 'philosophical theology' to begin with.

section unpicks the salient aspects of Ricoeur's architectonic, uncovering the aspects of metaphysical, anthropological and moral life for his hermeneutics of ethical life. The fourth and final section of this chapter summarises the main chapters of the thesis.

2. The Later Ricoeur's 'Religion' of Human Capability

2.1 The Later Ricoeur

In many ways, 'the later Ricoeur' is a misleading term. There is no distinct body of work comparable to, say, the philosophy of will¹⁵, that constitutes a final or later 'phase' in Ricoeur's authorship which can be neatly distinguished from the work that precedes it. While Ricoeur certainly engaged with an astonishingly diverse range of subjects throughout his long career, it is a central argument of this thesis that there always remains a central coherence or unity to his work as a whole. Ricoeur's explicit objects of enquiry may have changed, but at no stage is there a deliberate break with the body of work that precedes a particular study. So while *Freud and Philosophy*, for example, may initially appear to mark a radical departure from the two-part engagement with the possibility and experience of evil found in *Fallible Man* and *The Symbolism of Evil*, a closer inspection reveals that Ricoeur's hermeneutic engagement with Freud picks up on themes that had already been laid out in the closing pages of *The Symbolism of Evil* (FP 524-531; cf. SE 347-357, FM xlii-xlix). The later Ricoeur should therefore not be understood along the same lines as, say, the later Wittgenstein.

¹⁵ Ricoeur's philosophy of the will consists of two volumes. The first volume, *Le Volontaire et l'involontaire* (translated into English as *Freedom and Nature*) is a phenomenological analysis of the reciprocity between the voluntary and the involuntary which structures human freedom. The second volume, *Finitude et culpabilité* (translated into two separate English books as *Fallible Man* and *The Symbolism of Evil*) explores, in turn, the conditions of possibility for human evil, and the symbolic expressions of human evil. Ricoeur initially projected a third volume, a 'Poetics of the Will', but this was never published (see FN, FM, SE).

The 'later Ricoeur' is understood here to represent the handful of writings and interviews in which he renders explicit themes which can be traced implicitly throughout his philosophical corpus as a whole, and which are central to interpreting his philosophical project as a moral religion. These publications appeared in the years following *Oneself as Another*, and while the themes they address are themselves multifaceted, they are united by an expressed interest in the concept of *l'homme capable* or 'the capable human'.¹⁶

This interest in the capable human is accompanied by two further features which lend these final writings and interviews a unity. First, Ricoeur attempts to 'correlate' the concept of capability to a particular ontological tradition in the history of metaphysics which conceives of being as dynamic rather than substantial (Ricoeur 2002: 282). Ricoeur seeks to ground human capability in a deeper metaphysical exploration of what he calls the 'ground of being' (*OA* 308). Second, this growing interest in metaphysics/ontology accompanies a well-documented shift in Ricoeur's thought, where he begins to bridge the methodological gap he had previously resolutely maintained between his philosophical and theological writings (Ricoeur 2004a: 166-169; Treanor & Venema 2010: 1-21; Kearney 2010b). It will be argued that, in bridging this gap, Ricoeur uncovers a dynamic tradition within the history of metaphysics, developing a contemporary and original conception of being struck by the religious.¹⁷ The arrow of the religious strikes the capable human in her 'desire to be' and 'effort to exist'. Ricoeur's image of the arrow represents the human desire for life as religious. The human is conceived not as the passive recipient of the 'gift' of life, but rather in Spinozist terms as a capable subject increasing in activity; and this activity culminates in the joyful recognition of oneself as inextricably bound up in the

¹⁶ See the bibliography for a complete list of these publications. They include Ricoeur 1999, 2000a, 2002, 2004a, *MHF*, 2004c, *AV*, 2007b, 2007c, 2009.

¹⁷ Recalling the quote which opened this chapter, '*C'est en mon désir d'être, dans mon pouvoir d'exister, que la flèche du religieux vient m'atteindre*' (Ricoeur 2000a: 207-208).

whole. As capable human beings, we are predisposed to strive for that joy in the whole, propelled by the arrow of the religious in our desires and our efforts (Ricoeur 2000a: 207-208). Understood thus, Ricoeur's religion of human capability emerges not as submission to a personal (Christian) God,¹⁸ but rather as a 'primary *affirmation*' (FM xlvii. Emphasis added), an 'attestation' or a 'conviction'¹⁹ in God, Nature or Life as the whole of which we are all a part (cf. Spinoza Ip14C1; Ip40S1).

2.2 The Capable Human

The capable human is a metaphysical and ontological conception that is equally a conviction. To be human, for Ricoeur, is to be capable. Human capability is a constant, foundational theme in this thesis; it underlies Ricoeur's engagement with each of Spinoza, Aristotle, and Kant.

The concept of human capability derives from Ricoeur's conviction, appropriated from the French philosopher Jean Nabert, that a fundamental 'desire to be and effort to exist' lies behind all human actions (FP 46). The struggle for life or, as William Schweiker puts it, 'the pitch of human wants and desires for fulfilment against the onslaught of age, death, and suffering,' testifies to 'a *Wille zur Leben*, a will to life, in human existence' (Schweiker 2008: 90). The desire to be, the sense that it is good to be, is a primitive datum of human existence linked to the struggle to live (91). Ricoeur roots this desire and effort in Spinoza's concept of *conatus*, understood as the fundamental striving to persist in being

¹⁸ For a contrasting view that sees this shift in Ricoeur's thought as an expression of an avowedly Christian conviction, see Treanor & Venema 2010: 1-21. I discuss Treanor and Venema's interpretation of Ricoeur in section 2.5, below.

¹⁹ Crucially, for Ricoeur, attestation and conviction depend on 'belief *in*' (*la croyance*), which is to be distinguished from 'belief *that*' (*la certitude*). While 'belief *that*' corresponds to foundation, Cartesian knowledge, 'belief *in*' is more like trust in a testimony, as in the word of a witness in which one believes. See OA 21. Attestation is discussed in greater depth in chapter 4, section 2.3.

that is at the same time the very essence of human being (*OA* 316; Spinoza IIIp7; cf. *FP* 46). To be human is to strive to be; and that striving underlies all human actions. Ricoeur appropriates the *conatus* as a *capability*: the desire to be and effort to exist constitute the conative striving of a human being who is fundamentally capable. Chapter 1 will explore and assess Ricoeur's appropriation of Spinoza's *conatus*.

As the following chapters will reveal, capability is a concept deriving from the rationalist philosophies of *both* Spinoza and Kant. With Spinoza, Ricoeur presents human capability as our rational striving to be fully human. With Kant, Ricoeur presents capability as tantamount to an original or fundamental goodness that is anterior to the emergence of moral evil which, however inevitable it may seem, is always contingent. We remain forever capable, despite falling short, of overcoming moral evil and restoring our fundamental goodness. This fusion of Spinozist and Kantian concepts also marks the later Ricoeur's return to themes originally confronted during his early philosophy of the will. Specifically, Ricoeur revives his Kantian conviction that human capability presupposes an 'originary goodness of the human being', prior to the emergence of evil (Ricoeur 2002: 284; cf. *FM* 145). Or, in Ricoeur's Kantian terms: 'As radical as evil may be, it will never be more originary than goodness...[which is] rooted in the ontological structure of the human being' (Ricoeur 2002: 284).

So while the later Ricoeur exhibits an increased focus on Spinoza's metaphysics, he also returns to state explicitly his Kantian conviction in fundamental human goodness, originally expressed as early as *Fallible Man*: 'However primordial badness may be, goodness is yet more primordial' (*FM* 145). Ricoeur moves from the Kantian framework

of *Fallible Man*²⁰ to appropriate Spinoza's *conatus*, only to renew his Kantian conviction in original goodness enriched by Spinoza. This move is entirely in line with the *reflexive* nature of his philosophy, which will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.

2.3 Human Capacities

Ricoeur's final writings delineate a typology of basic capacities, for example, of speech and action, which are particular manifestations, on the *anthropological* plane, of a fundamental human capability. Human capacities are 'the place of readability' for a 'metaphysical' quality of being a 'capable human' (*OA* 308; Ricoeur 2005: 69, 91); they are 'basic powers' which reveal 'the primary foundation of humanity' (Ricoeur 2004c).

Ricoeur derives from Aristotle an anthropological framework for exploring human capacities. Aristotle's anthropology of human virtue helps explain how the development of capacities is to a large degree a matter of fortune. What is manifested as a capacity could just as easily have been an incapacity, depending on a host of factors beyond the subject's control; whether it is one's physical attributes, for example, or one's social and cultural environment. Even if one is constitutionally and circumstantially fortunate enough to develop certain capacities, they will remain vulnerable to damage, which can be inflicted by other subjects, or a change in one's physical or social environment, over the course of the subject's life. It is for this reason that Ricoeur's architectonic includes a substantial Kantian moral norm with which to regulate human living and to safeguard against our constitutional fragility and vulnerability.

²⁰ Anderson 'unequivocally' describes *Fallible Man* as 'without a doubt Ricoeur's most overtly Kantian book' (1993: 10).

2.4 The Ground of Being

As will be seen in the course of this thesis, Ricoeur's final essays and interviews attempt to ground human capability in a dynamic metaphysics of being. Ricoeur identifies this metaphysics with a particular ontological tradition, beginning with 'Aristotle's *Metaphysics*...which may be followed through Leibniz and Spinoza down to Schelling, Dilthey, and...Paul Tillich' (Ricoeur 2002: 282). Crucially, this tradition departs from the convention of conceiving being in substantialist or mechanistic terms by appealing to the categories of possibility and actuality. As Ricoeur explains in a 2003 interview with Richard Kearney:

As I get older I have been increasingly interested in exploring certain metaphysics of potency and act. In *Oneself as Another*, I broach this in my analysis of the *capacity* to speak, narrate, act. This phenomenology of the 'I can', in turn, brings me to Aristotle's attempt in the *Metaphysics* E 2 to outline meta-categories of potentiality and actuality in line with his commitment to a plurality of meanings of being...But if I am on the side of metaphysics here, it is, admittedly, in the somewhat minority camp of those who prefer the categories of possibility and actuality to that of 'substance'. If the mainstream and official tradition of Western metaphysics has been substantialist, this does not preclude other metaphysical paths, such as those leading from Aristotle's *dunamis* to Spinoza's *conatus* and Schelling's and Leibniz's notions of potentiality (*puissance*). Here we find a dynamic notion of being as potency and action...which contrasts sharply with the old substantialist models of scholasticism or the mechanistic models of Descartes. (Ricoeur 2004a: 166)

Ricoeur appropriates Aristotle's attempt to conceive being as actuality (*energeia*) and potentiality (*dunamis*) (*Metaphysics* V.2; cf. Ricoeur 2002: 282; *OA* 20-21) through Spinoza's *conatus* (as well as others). This provides a potentially significant ground for both Ricoeur's metaphysics of human capability and his anthropology of human capacities.²¹ Ricoeur claims that '*energeia-dunamis* points toward a *ground of being*, at once potentiality and actuality *against which human action stands out*.' In other words, he says, 'it appears equally important that human action be the *place of readability* par excellence of this acceptance of being as distinct from all others...and that being as actuality and potentiality have *other fields of application* than human action alone' (*OA* 308. Emphasis added). For Ricoeur, human action, as a human capacity, functions as an interpretive key or 'place of readability' for some greater whole of which it is a particular – but by no means the sole – component, manifestation and expression. This whole grounds human actions, and human capacities generally.

Ricoeur's fundamental human capability thus designates a defining metaphysical characteristic of human being that, on the one hand, becomes manifested in particular anthropological capacities and that, on the other hand, is also rooted in a broader metaphysical understanding of the ground of being as the ultimate source of those capacities.

2.5 Ricoeur's 'philosophical theology'

Until recently, Ricoeur's entire philosophical project was characterised by his determination to pursue 'an autonomous philosophical discourse'. This was reflected in his attempt, in *Oneself as Another*, to 'assume the bracketing, conscious and resolute, of the

²¹ See the final exploratory chapter of *Oneself as Another*, 'What Ontology in View?' (*OA* 297-356).

convictions that bind me to biblical faith' (OA 24).²² *Oneself as Another* therefore pursues an inquiry into the hermeneutics of selfhood that remains purely *philosophical*. This means that all questions pertaining to the self, including those of moral motivation and religious belief, can and will only be pursued philosophically – that is, strictly within the limits of a philosophical inquiry that remains 'autonomous', immune to the claims of any religious conviction.²³

It is therefore interesting to note how the later Ricoeur is less inclined to preserve this 'autonomous philosophical discourse'. Instead, Ricoeur's final essays and interviews betray an urge to confront and challenge the unstable and contestable line between philosophy and theology. As he admits to Kearney:

...my thought is not so removed from certain religious and biblical issues as my standard policy of 'conceptual asceticism' might have been prepared to admit in the past...I no longer consider such conceptual asceticism tenable'. (Ricoeur 2004a: 169)

Instead, Ricoeur explores the religious significance of his metaphysical explorations of the ground of being in what can only be described as 'a sort of philosophical theology or theological philosophy – not an easy task in a contemporary intellectual culture which still

²² 'It will be observed that this asceticism of the argument, which marks, I believe, all my philosophical work, leads to a type of philosophy from which the actual mention of God is absent and in which the question of God, as a philosophical question, itself remains in a suspension that could be called agnostic, as the final lines of the tenth study ['What Ontology in View?'] will attest. It is in an effort not to make an exception to this suspension that the sole extension given to the nine studies conducted within the dimension of a philosophical hermeneutics consists in an *ontological* investigation that involves no ontotheological amalgamations.' (OA 24).

²³ In the final lines of *Oneself as Another*, reflecting on the phenomenon of conscience, Ricoeur writes: 'Perhaps the philosopher has to admit that one does not know and cannot say whether this Other, the source of the injunction, is another person whom I can look in the face or who can stare at me, or my ancestors for whom there is no representation, to so great an extent does my debt to them constitute my very self, or God – living God, absent God – or an empty place. With this aporia of the Other, philosophical discourse comes to an end' (OA 355).

wants people to say whether they are “philosophers” *or* “theologians” and is uncomfortable with overlaps’ (Ricoeur 2004a: 167).

Ricoeur claims that this shift in his thought arose upon realising that his close readings of Old Testament texts in the 1990s (published with André Lacocque in 1998 as *Thinking Biblically*²⁴) belonged ‘to the same line of thought’ as his ‘exploration of the grounds of a philosophical anthropology in ontology’ (Ricoeur 2002: 283). Ricoeur’s increased interest in the ground of being is not limited to the metaphysical tradition of *energeia-dunamis* in which he locates Aristotle and Spinoza. It also drives his engagement, in *Thinking Biblically*, with the ontological and eschatological implications of the ‘I am who I am episode’ in Exodus 3.14 (Lacocque & Ricoeur 1998: 331-361).²⁵ What fascinates Ricoeur about this passage is the conception of being which is utterly ‘alien to Greek usage’. In other words, Ricoeur draws on the Hebraic text to enrich his ontology, by including:

...new notions of *being-with*, *being-faithful*, *being-in-accompaniment* with one’s community or people (which is precisely what Yahweh promises Moses when he says ‘I am he who will be with you’). (Ricoeur 2004a: 166)

Ricoeur thus urges ‘the enlargement of Greek ontology’ to accommodate and respond to such other meanings as a means of bridging the traditional antagonism ‘between Hellenic and Hebraic meanings of being’, on the one hand, and between the philosophical and theological traditions, on the other (Ricoeur 2004a: 167).

²⁴ Lacocque & Ricoeur 1998.

²⁵ ‘God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, “I AM has sent me to you.”’ (Exodus 3:14, New Revised Standard Version).

Some recent readings of the later Ricoeur have interpreted this development in his thought as an explicitly Christian, theological turn. Brian Treanor and Henry Isaac Venema's interpretation of Ricoeur's philosophy in light of these late essays speaks of a 'profoundly religious' meaning at the heart of the concept of human capability 'attesting to the gift of the "Christic symbol"' (Treanor & Venema 2010: 2).

While I agree with Treanor and Venema that a religious conviction is undoubtedly at play in Ricoeur's (however incomplete) sketch of the capable human, I am not convinced by their attempts to interpret this conviction in explicitly Christian theological terms. Ricoeur's late writings undoubtedly attempt to overcome this 'conceptual asceticism' which, he concedes, characterised his previous attempts to keep philosophy and theology at arm's length (Ricoeur 2004a: 169). However, I maintain that Ricoeur would have remained uncomfortable with the deliberate inscription of theological or, more strongly, explicitly Christian terms into his philosophical account of religion. The later Ricoeur is not proposing some coded Christian philosophy: despite his well-documented Christian convictions²⁶, Ricoeur continued to carefully distance himself from the title, 'Christian philosopher' (Ricoeur 2009: 69-70). Instead, this thesis argues that the later Ricoeur's attempt to bridge the gap between his philosophical and theological writings expresses a thinner and broader 'religious' reverence for *Life* as that which binds us all together as capable human beings, irrespective of particular religious traditions. This, it will be maintained, is how Ricoeur ought to be interpreted when he challenges 'the absolute irreconcilability between the God of the Bible and the God of Being' (Ricoeur 2004a: 169).

The claim that Ricoeur is not a Christian philosopher is supported by the admission that his later thought marks a deliberate turning *away* from an anti-metaphysical,

²⁶ See Reagan 1996.

Protestant tradition in Christian theology. This tradition posits an unassailable difference between human and divine in stressing the inherent finitude and fallenness of mortal life. As Ricoeur explains, 'I no longer subscribe to the typically anti-metaphysical Protestant lineage of Karl Barth (though it is true that in early works like *The Symbolism of Evil* I was still somewhat under this influence)' (Ricoeur 2004a: 166). Ricoeur's expressed turn from the Protestant heritage of his formative years²⁷ therefore marks a shift away from conceiving of life strictly in terms of a 'God' who is infinitely 'Other'. Instead, Ricoeur offers a Spinozist conception of Life as a single, dynamic substance in which we all inhere, and which is inseparable from his insistence on the 'tacit potencies and acts of our lived existence' which imply a fundamental human *capability* (Ricoeur 2004a: 167). The later Ricoeur's religion of human capability is not theo-centric; rather it begins with human life, driven by a conviction in both the capable human, and the source from which that capability springs.

What finally distinguishes Ricoeur's architectonic as a *religion* of human capability, then, is the conviction that one's capability, as possibility, forever renders one *qua* capable human part of a dynamic whole. In Life, to be human is to participate in this whole of which one is an inextricable and irreplaceable component. Religion is what binds humans together in the joyful recognition of themselves as corporate, uniquely singular and yet inextricably embedded in the whole. In Ricoeur's own words: '*Ce que compte, c'est le fait que nous sommes la parcelle d'un grand tout. Le trajet de cette parcelle, que ne sait pas parcelle au début, mais qui ne se reconnaît parcelle à la fin*' (Ricoeur 1999: 44-45).²⁸ These, then, are the distinguishing

²⁷ See Ricoeur 1998: 5-6 on his Protestant upbringing.

²⁸ 'What counts is the fact that we are an individual part of a great whole. But this individual does not recognise itself as a part at the beginning, but only at the end of its journey.' NB-I have modified this translation from the original French to render the passage coherent in philosophical terms.

features of the later Ricoeur's religion of human capability. The next section unpicks the main aspects of his architectonic of moral religion.

3. Ricoeur's Architectonic

3.1 Spinoza, Aristotle, Kant

Each chapter of this thesis works to shape Ricoeur's architectonic of moral religion. Chapters 1-3 gradually draw out salient elements of metaphysics, anthropology and morality. In contrast to a Barthian tradition of Christian theology from which he deliberately distances himself, Ricoeur attests that to be human is not to be flawed or fallen, but to be fundamentally capable.²⁹ Ricoeur's hermeneutics of ethical life is therefore grounded in a metaphysics of fundamental human capability, from which an anthropology of basic human capacities springs. In turn, this anthropology grounds an ethical pursuit of the good life, with and for others, in just institutions (*OA* 172). The good life emerges as the ultimate (ethical) aim of a moral religion. Ricoeur combines Spinoza's metaphysics of human striving with Aristotle's *telos* to explain how human desires are propelled by the religious towards an ethical life (cf. Ricoeur 2000a: 207-208). The ethical *telos* is, in turn, limited by a Kantian moral norm, placing the human desire to be within just institutions. Essentially, the moral norm regulates our conduct with and for others. This Kantian moral norm renders Ricoeur's architectonic a *moral* religion. This is a religion based on human reason, and on the human subject as a rational and political animal. The human's conduct with and for others is governed by a norm to which she subjects herself and through which she interprets her

²⁹ Ricoeur's rationalist architectonic thus offers a radical alternative to a traditional approach in Christian philosophy of religion and philosophical theology, which has derived its doctrine from the philosophy and theology of Augustine, Aquinas, Locke, and Calvin. See, for example, Wolterstorff 2009.

pursuit of the good life. Crucially, however, Ricoeur also draws on Spinoza and Aristotle to modify the Kantian rationalism supporting this moral norm. This modification produces an acute understanding of human subjects not simply as autonomous rational actors, but also as vulnerable acting and suffering selves who depend upon others in exactly the same manner that others depend upon them. Ricoeur's architectonic thus operates at metaphysical, anthropological, and moral levels, which derive, whether explicitly or implicitly, from particular readings of Spinoza, Aristotle, and Kant. The architectonic forms a moral religion which is driven by the ideal of the good life, with and for others, in just institutions.

This thesis undertakes a hermeneutic engagement with all three philosophers in order to render concrete this architectonic which, it is argued, is latent in the later Ricoeur. At this stage, two further features of the architectonic must be highlighted. First, the hermeneutic readings of the three philosophers can broadly be defined, using Ricoeur's self-description, as 'post-Hegelian Kantian.'³⁰ The reflexive method of Ricoeur's hermeneutics is inherited from Hegel; however, Ricoeur does not accept the Hegelian system of absolute knowledge, and so returns from Hegel to the boundaries of human knowledge established by Kant. For Ricoeur, acknowledging the boundaries of human knowledge and action is necessary in order to properly grasp human existence. And yet, Ricoeur's post-Hegelian Kantianism is more complex than a straightforward return to Kant after Hegel. For as will be discovered in subsequent chapters, Ricoeur modifies his reading of Kant with post-Hegelian readings of Spinoza and Aristotle. Ricoeur returns to Kant after Hegel, but in doing so his subsequent readings of Kant are shaped both by his appropriation of Spinoza and Aristotle and his encounter with post-Hegelian critiques of Kant's critical philosophy.³¹ Moreover, the

³⁰ See Ricoeur 1998: 83 for his discussion of this self-description.

³¹ For a useful survey of (post) Hegelian critiques and modifications of the Kantian critical project, see Pippin 2005: 27-53.

reflexive nature of Ricoeur's hermeneutics leads him to move back and forth between the philosophers appropriated for his architectonic: so while his engagement with Spinoza and Aristotle may lead him to modify his reading of Kant, his understanding of Kant will also lead him in turn to modify his readings of Spinoza and Aristotle. Whether or not this reflexive modification is deliberate, or simply Ricoeur's Kantian presuppositions informing his readings of Spinoza and Aristotle, is a critical question that must be kept in mind when assessing Ricoeur's hermeneutic appropriation of Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant together, and the plausibility of the architectonic informed by his engagement with these three philosophers. Whether Ricoeur can render Spinoza, Aristotle, and Kant compatible, let alone whether this can be done while employing this particular hermeneutic strategy, is a concern that will be repeatedly raised and examined throughout the thesis.

Second, the architectonic brings to light the strong *rationalist* thread running through Spinoza, Aristotle, and Kant, *in that order*. It begins with Spinoza's metaphysics, before traversing the levels of Aristotle's anthropology and Kant's morality. Crucially, reason as it is employed by all three philosophers is not to be understood as some transcendent faculty, but rather, with Ricoeur, as a practical *capability* shared among all humans as rational beings. If to be human is to be fundamentally capable, then that capability includes a fundamentally rational nature which enables human subjects to increase in understanding, ultimately arriving at the joyful recognition of themselves as part of the wider whole called Life.

3.2 Hermeneutics of Ethical Life

This subsection explains why Ricoeur's hermeneutics of ethical life is essential to grasping the way in which the architectonic enables a three-fold reading of religion. 'Life', in this thesis, includes both everyday lived experience, and reality or being in its broadest sense,

whether called God, Nature, or, among the various terms recently entertained by David Tracy, the “Infinite”, the “Incomprehensible”, the “Impassable”, and even ‘the Impossible.’³² Although Tracy might be questioned in his use of these terms, his deliberate avoidance of the word ‘God’ in a recent paper, ‘Western Hermeneutics and Inter-Religious Dialogue’, challenges philosophers of religion to scrutinise the assumptions that lie behind their use of theological concepts, including the concept of ‘God’. In this case, Tracy is arguing that a broader term than ‘God’ is needed for those situated within the Abrahamic religions to open a constructive, inter-religious dialogue. Similarly, this thesis uses the term ‘life’ in the deliberately broad sense outlined above to denote that which is *shared* by all humans as beings which are given life, develop, come to fullness of life, and to the end of life. Life is to be understood, qua universal, as that which is attested to in binding us together as capable human beings; it therefore constitutes the *religious* dimension of Ricoeur’s architectonic. Religion is understood in this context in terms of its Latin root, *religare*, meaning to ‘bind fast’.

Ricoeur’s conception of ethical life is developed through his reflexive hermeneutics, which elucidates the embeddedness of each and every human being. That is, Ricoeur’s reflexive, hermeneutic account of selfhood reveals each self to be inextricably embedded in relations with those around her. This embeddedness is a constitutive aspect of human being – to be human is both to depend upon others and to have others depend upon oneself. It is for this reason that Ricoeur defines ethical life as ‘aiming at the good life, with and for others, in just institutions’ (*OA* 172). The role of ethics in a Ricoeurian architectonic is to ensure that each and every human being may flourish, or pursue uninhibited, to the greatest degree possible, her vision of her own good life. However, in

³² Tracy 2009.

order for this ethical aim to be fully realised, it must first meet the demands imposed upon it by the moral norm. For morality, as distinct from ethics, is a normative framework, willingly imposed upon our pursuit of the good life, as a means of ensuring that each individual's pursuit of their good does not come at the expense of those around them.

As discussed, Ricoeur appropriates this moral norm from his hermeneutic engagement with Kant. Yet it is significant that Kant's own normative framework is ultimately driven by an unerring conviction in a human *predisposition to good* which partly informs Ricoeur's own concept of human capability (cf. section 2.2, above). In line with the philosophical method behind it, then, we can understand the shape of Ricoeur's architectonic reflexively³³: it begins at the level of metaphysics, with a conviction in a fundamental human capability; it proceeds to the anthropological level with an account of vulnerable human capacities; it arrives at the moral level with the introduction of a moral norm to protect or sustain those vulnerable capacities; and that moral norm then returns us to the foundational level of metaphysics – for the norm itself is driven and sustained by the metaphysical conviction in fundamental human capability.

3.3 Moral Religion

Ricoeur's architectonic aims to guide and regulate human living with and for others as a *moral religion*. The architectonic grounds moral religion by encompassing life in its metaphysical, anthropological and moral dimensions, respectively. For as the previous subsection established, religion is intimately connected to life as that which binds us together as capable human beings. This particular characteristic of the architectonic, combined with this particular understanding of religion, reveals the strongly Kantian

³³ Ricoeur's reflexive method will be discussed in chapter 4. See Ricoeur 1991 for his own discussion of reflexivity.

dimension to the later Ricoeur's philosophical project. In *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Kant famously sketches a framework for moral religion as an 'ethical commonwealth' which binds all human beings together in respect for one another as rational ends-in-themselves (R 6: 97). Ricoeur's architectonic certainly aims toward such a commonwealth; but Ricoeur differs from Kant in his understanding of what binds human beings together. It is not simply *religion* within the boundaries of mere reason, but religion understood in terms of *life* within the boundaries of mere reason. Ricoeur modifies his architectonic by appropriating both Spinoza's *conatus* and Aristotle's anthropology of human vulnerability alongside Kant's ethical commonwealth. Ricoeur's architectonic of moral religion reveals the three dimensions of life – metaphysical, anthropological and moral – which provide an inalienable common bond for human beings.

The *reflexive* nature of Ricoeur's architectonic also grounds a moral religion. As chapter 4 will explain, Ricoeur's reflexive conceptions of the self and of autonomy necessitate selfhood's intimate connection to *otherness*. Self and other are bound together and sustained in what they share as reflexively autonomous agents. Ricoeur's conception of selfhood depends upon a *reflexivity-conviction* that being oneself inasmuch as other in acting and suffering is embedded in the *relational* nature of human autonomy (OA 3). It is this embeddedness which gives a distinctly *religious* dimension to Ricoeur's hermeneutics of ethical life. For in coming to see ourselves as embedded – that is, intimately connected to others – we recognise that, in religious terms, we are bound to others by virtue of what we share. And what we share is not simply our embeddedness in relation to each other as (acting and suffering) autonomous agents, but also our embeddedness as part of the whole we call Life (cf. Ricoeur 1999).

4. The Structure of the Thesis

The evidence supporting the above claims accumulates as I unpack the aspects of Spinoza's metaphysics, Aristotle's anthropology, and Kant's moral philosophy which inform Ricoeur's architectonic. This will enable a detailed discussion of Ricoeur's conception of reflexive autonomy as the thread which holds Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant together as the basis for a moral religion.

Chapter 1 develops Ricoeur's engagement with the immanent metaphysics in Spinoza's *Ethics*. The chapter examines in particular how Spinoza's concept of *conatus* shapes Ricoeur's concept of human capability, and how Spinoza's presentation of 'God or Nature' as a single substance in which everything inheres informs the presentation of Life defended in this thesis. Despite a growing interest in Spinoza's thought, this reading of Spinoza in Ricoeur's texts remains controversial. In particular, it raises critical questions concerning how far Spinoza's determinist account of freedom and his denial of the qualitative distinctness of individuals can be combined with Ricoeur's defence of Kant's compatibilism and, in particular, of individual autonomy. The chapter will consider these critical concerns, arguing that the textual evidence for a Spinozist influence on Ricoeur's concept of capability is compelling, and that the hermeneutic method attributed to Ricoeur in this thesis enables him to incorporate Spinozist concepts into his architectonic while preserving his Kantian commitments.

Chapter 2 derives from Aristotle an anthropological framework for exploring human *capacities* or abilities. The chapter examines how capacities in particular are vulnerable to factors beyond the agent's control, and how human life in general must be

understood as structurally fragile. Nothing illustrates this better than Ricoeur's Aristotelian account of friendship. Ricoeur presents friendship as both a fundamental human need and as something that renders us deeply vulnerable to factors beyond our control. While this emphasis on human vulnerability appears *prima facie* to challenge Kantian autonomy, it will be argued that Ricoeur deliberately appropriates Aristotle to develop a modified conception of autonomy which accounts for the fact that the autonomous agent is always-already vulnerable to those with and among whom she interacts. In other words, Ricoeur preserves Kantian autonomy while incorporating elements of Aristotle's account of anthropological life.

It is in response to this inescapable vulnerability and fragility that Ricoeur introduces a moral norm into his conception of ethical life. Chapter 3 explores Ricoeur's appropriation of this norm from Kant's moral philosophy. The chapter also assesses two features of Kant's own moral religion which inform Ricoeur's architectonic. These are: i) Kant's ideal of a distinctly democratic, shared moral perspective which is social, universal, and bound up with autonomy and rationality; and ii) Kant's rationally responsible attempt to recover a fundamental human goodness overshadowed – but never destroyed – by the corrupting influence of society. The critical issue here is how Kant, and Ricoeur after him, can preserve this conception of fundamental goodness or original innocence while maintaining that a radical propensity to evil or, in Ricoeur's terms, fallibility, infects human willing. It will be argued that Kant's often overlooked account of virtue as a constant struggle to adhere to the good in the face of heteronomous inclinations which can become corrupted by society allows Ricoeur to reconcile our propensity to err with a goodness or capability which is always more fundamental. The propensity to evil need not and should not be taken to imply a fundamentally corrupt human nature. Instead, it simply

underscores the necessity of a moral norm with which individuals can regulate their pursuits of the good life, in order to safeguard against the instrumental treatment of others. Humans remain *fundamentally* capable of a return to the good from which they err.

Chapter 4 contains the pivotal argument of this thesis. The chapter undertakes a detailed discussion of Ricoeur's reflexive conception of autonomy, explaining how Ricoeur's reflexive method enables him to thread Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant together. Critical questions raised intermittently in the preceding three chapters, concerning the compatibility of these three philosophers, and the plausibility of the architectonic, will be considered in light of a detailed assessment of Ricoeur's post-Hegelian Kantian account of autonomy. Specifically, it will be asked whether Ricoeur's post-Hegelian appropriations of Spinoza and Aristotle modify his reading of Kantian autonomy to such an extent that it no longer makes sense to speak of Ricoeur meaningfully as a Kantian. In response, it will be argued that the account of autonomy criticised – and radically modified – by Ricoeur should be attributed not to Kant, but to the formalist readings of Kant so prominent in Anglo-American ethics in the 1980s, during which time Ricoeur was working on *Oneself as Another*. Furthermore, it will be claimed that despite the inclusion of Spinoza and Aristotle within the architectonic, Ricoeur's Kantian commitments remain clear, not least in his defence of a fundamental human capability, and his development of a Kantian moral norm with which to combat the human propensity to evil.

The final, concluding chapter undertakes a retrospective assessment of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of ethical life. This includes a critical summary of his attempt, via his appropriation of Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant, to unveil the core of Ricoeur's moral religion; that is, three dimensions of life – metaphysical, anthropological and moral – which are shared by all human beings in their however distinctive pursuits of the good. It will be

concluded that, by employing Ricoeur's architectonic as an interpretative framework, the reader can trace moral religion, as presented in this thesis, as a constant theme in Ricoeur's writings as far back as the philosophy of the will.

This, then, is what the following chapters set out to do. They argue that the later Ricoeur provides a highly instructive interpretative key with which to assess his broader philosophical project. Reading Ricoeur's later philosophy as a moral religion deeply enriches our understanding of his philosophical project as a whole. This emerges as a distinctive and timely contribution to contemporary philosophy of religion.³⁴

³⁴ I would like to thank George Pattison, David Jasper and Daniel Whistler for their comments. Most of all, I would like to express my thanks to Pamela Sue Anderson for her support and advice over the course of this research project.

CHAPTER ONE

RELIGION AS METAPHYSICAL LIFE IN SPINOZA

I have written very little on Spinoza, although he is always to be found in my meditation and my teaching. I share...the conviction that “all Spinozist themes can be centered around the notion of life”.

(Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 315).

1. Introduction

Spinoza is not a name that features often in Ricoeur scholarship. Instead, one typically finds the likes of Aristotle and Kant, Husserl and Heidegger, even Jaspers and Marcel scattered throughout the many lengthy studies of Ricoeur’s thought. This fact can be attributed in part to the relative lack of explicit references to Spinoza in Ricoeur’s own writings. Granted, Spinoza does feature – albeit briefly – in some of Ricoeur’s most significant works.¹ But this presence pales in comparison to the excruciating detail with which Ricoeur will often unpack salient aspects of the above philosophers’ thoughts in proceeding to his own constructive conclusions. Spinoza does not receive anything like the extensive exegetical treatment Ricoeur regularly devotes to Aristotle or Kant, for example.

Be this as it may, two factors in particular indicate that Spinoza’s influence on Ricoeur is far more extensive than textual references alone suggest. First, when Spinoza *does* emerge in Ricoeur’s texts, it is at moments of decisive importance – a fact that is more suggestive of a

¹ See, for example, *FM* 137-141; *FP* 46-47, 454-456; *OA* 315-317; *MHF* 357.

particular philosopher's influence on Ricoeur than hundreds of pages of scattered exegesis. Second, the central concepts that shape the later Ricoeur's thought all bear the mark of Spinoza's metaphysics. As Ricoeur himself remarks, although 'I have written very little on Spinoza', he is *always* to be found in my meditation and my teaching' (OA 315).

The argument here is that Ricoeur finds in Spinoza a means of responding to the question that was to guide his philosophical thought from the closing pages of *Oneself as Another* until his death: the question of 'What Ontology in View?'². As the previous chapter established, Ricoeur's later thought is marked by the attempt to seek an ontological foundation to the phenomenology of human capacities which emerges from the hermeneutics of selfhood in *Oneself as Another*. The present chapter argues that Ricoeur finds in Spinoza a means of exploring the underlying substrata or power, the source of human capability, that enables him to respond to the question of 'What Ontology in View?' with his ontology of the capable human being. It will be argued that this ontology derives from Spinoza's conception of *conatus*.

What follows here is a critical assessment of particular concepts in Spinoza's metaphysics which inform the later Ricoeur's hermeneutics of ethical life. This assessment has two purposes. First, it teases out the concepts in Spinoza which contribute to Ricoeur's moral religion. Second, it scrutinises these central features of Spinoza's metaphysics in order to free moral religion from the presuppositions inherent in much contemporary philosophy of religion. Spinoza, it will be argued, enables Ricoeur to challenge analytic philosophers of religion to scrutinise the assumptions that lie behind their use of theological concepts. Spinoza's unique definition of concepts such as 'God', 'Nature', and 'Life' challenges us to reconsider our use of these as theological concepts. Furthermore, the critical insights of

² This question also forms the title of the final chapter (the '10th Study') of *Oneself as Another* (see OA 297-356).

Spinoza's metaphysics also enable Ricoeur to bring new interpretations to bear on our readings of other central figures in the history of moral philosophy, as will be demonstrated with Aristotle and Kant.

The following section of this chapter begins with a discussion of Spinoza's unique conception of 'substance' as 'God or Nature' (*deus sive natura*), and the crucial metaphysical grounding this provides both for Ricoeur's phenomenology of human capacities, and for the distinctive conception of moral religion presented in this thesis. The third section examines Spinoza's concept of *conatus*, which will emerge as crucial for Ricoeur's own concept of human capability. The fourth section discusses the formative role that Spinoza's metaphysical and ethical concepts play in the later Ricoeur's hermeneutics of ethical life. Finally, the fifth section raises critical questions concerning the relation between Spinoza and Kant within Ricoeur's architectonic. It will be argued that, despite potential points of conflict between the two that are not without real difficulty, a particular reading of Spinoza reveals ways in which he and Kant might be fruitfully combined. This combination yields potentially great benefits to Ricoeur's rationalist conception of moral religion.

2. Core Concepts for Religion as Metaphysical Life

2.1 Substance or God

It is impossible to make sense of Spinoza's metaphysics apart from his unique theory of substance, from which the entire enterprise of his *Ethics* springs. Appearing in the wake of Descartes' Cartesian revolution, Spinoza's initial definition of substance appears straightforward enough: 'By substance', he says, 'I understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, that is, that whose concept does not require the concept of another

thing, from which it must be formed' (Id3). Substance, in other words, is conceptually and ontologically necessary and self-sufficient. However, the conclusion Spinoza derives from this definition is no less than extraordinary. His claim is that there can only be *one* substance. Everything that exists – the sun, stars, trees, tables, tennis rackets, thoughts, desires, dreams – exists only insofar as it is 'in' substance. Substance is that 'in' which everything that is, is (Ia1). There are no fundamentally different domains of being for Spinoza, no fundamentally different levels of being, no fundamentally different ways of being. To be, is to be 'in substance' (Moore 2011, forthcoming). This is Spinoza's ontological monism.

Spinoza calls this single substance in which everything inheres 'God or Nature'. This is not to be conflated with the God of Genesis. Rather, the 'God' of the *Ethics*, far from being the transcendent creator of heaven and earth, is a single substance possessing an infinity of attributes that is synonymous with 'Nature'; hence Spinoza's formula, *deus sive natura* ('God or Nature'). For Spinoza, there is no transcendent Other; no unsurpassable gap between mortal and divine, between finite and infinite. To repeat, to be just is to be 'in' substance.

This is clearly a radical reconception of the term 'God' as it is typically employed by analytic philosophers of religion. To speak of 'God', here, is emphatically not to speak in terms of the attributes of the transcendent God of Christian theism. Instead, Spinoza offers a metaphysical conception of Nature as a vast and immanent (i.e. self-contained) causal network, which he also refers to as 'God'. Crucially, this 'Nature' is not reducible to the empirical world inhabited by human beings and other creatures. Rather 'nature', as we experience it, is merely a limited aspect of this infinite 'Nature' of which we are all indispensable components.³ The result, as Steven Smith explains, is 'a new kind of piety with

³ This is made clear in Spinoza's account of the attributes of substance, discussed below.

a new form of worship.’ Spinoza ‘denies the transcendent status of the divine in part because he seeks to divinize the natural world’ (Smith 2003: 18-19).

One of the aims of the *Ethics* is to free human beings from the historical practice of religion and from the revealed script on which this practice is based. Spinoza’s philosophical theology, if it can be so described, challenges his readers to question their presuppositions, to examine the content of their theological concepts. In this respect, it can also help to assess Ricoeur’s own basic understanding of terms such as ‘God.’ Ricoeur himself would agree with Genevieve Lloyd’s comment that Spinoza offers us insight not only into ‘the dominant images and guiding fictions’ of contemporary thought, but also the ways in which ‘our institutions are structured by such affectively invested thought patterns’ (Gatens & Lloyd 1999: 4-5). Lloyd continues:

A Spinozistic approach...can be a powerful tool for opening up possibilities for the social critique of fictions which elude the resources of more conventional criticism. (Gatens & Lloyd 1999: 4-5)

This ‘Spinozist approach’ resonates with Ricoeur’s hermeneutic use of Spinoza’s social critique of traditional theism. Spinoza presents ‘God’ as possessing an infinity of ‘attributes’. An attribute is ‘what the intellect perceives of substance, as constituting its essence’ (Id4). However, only two of these attributes are accessible to the human intellect; namely, thought and extension. This marks a further departure for Spinoza from traditional theism: the divine attributes cease to be properties of a transcendent God; rather they are ways in which the essence of substance is expressed and understood. The relationship between substance and its attributes is helpfully illustrated in Gilles Deleuze’s account of the

ways in which reality is construed and articulated by substance in Spinoza. The ways in which reality is both construed and articulated has been referred to by Deleuze as the ‘expression’ of substance.⁴ It is in this relation of ‘expression’ between ‘God’ and the attributes that we see most clearly what is distinctive about Spinoza’s conception of substance.

Deleuze relates the expressive power of substance to the expressive power of verbs, in contrast to the more passive role of adjectives characteristic of mere properties. Ricoeur too picks up on this relation, citing the ‘internal dynamism’ of substance which is ‘expressed in a definite and determinate way’ by ‘the attributes of God’ (*OA* 316). Spinoza’s attributes, in other words, are *dynamic*. Substance *expresses itself*; the attributes are its expressions. Deleuze suggests that the term ‘expression’, in this context, has implicit in it two traditional metaphors: the idea of a mirror, reflecting images, and that of the germ or seed which expresses a tree, for example (Deleuze 1990: 80). Spinoza’s attributes are mirrors, each expressing in its own way the essence of substance. But what is ‘expressed’ is also enveloped in the expression, like the tree in the seed. This is no passive reflection, but an active, dynamic *articulation* (Lloyd 1996: 31).

Furthermore, under the different attributes, we also find particular ‘modes’ of substance. A mode is ‘that which is in another’ (Id5): something which cannot exist independently but only in some other thing, upon which it depends – that whose existence is not necessary, but contingent. Modes thus cover every aspect of our known universe; from the most basic entities to the most complex, from atoms and electrons, to tables and chairs, to human beings and other living organisms; everything, in other words, that is ‘in’ substance and, insofar as it is in substance, depends for its existence on substance. Human beings are thus modes of the one necessary and ontologically independent substance. Specifically, each

⁴ For Deleuze on expression, particularly in his reading of Spinoza, see Deleuze 1990. See also Moore 2011, forthcoming.

human being is a particular mode which expresses in a particular way infinite, eternal substance. As modes of substance, we not only participate in and express substance – we *are* substance articulating itself. Human life – indeed, all life, for that matter – is therefore inextricable from Spinoza’s conception of God or Nature as substance. To say ‘God’, for Spinoza, is to say ‘Life’, and vice versa.

As Ricoeur rightly points out, the essential point of Spinoza’s monism is that the traditional image of God as a transcendent creator ‘is replaced by an infinite power, an *acting energy*’ (OA 315n21). The metaphysical reality proposed by Spinoza is not merely immanent. Crucially, it is also *dynamic*, a power that precedes and envelops everything that we call life.

*

It should be pointed out at this stage that the reading of Spinoza presented here would not find agreement among all scholars. There are many readers of Spinoza, particularly within the Anglophone tradition, who reject readings of Spinoza’s substance as dynamic, preferring to read him simply as a static monist.⁵ The reading presented here, on the other hand, is influenced by those German vitalists who shaped many interpretations of Spinoza within the Continental tradition, including those of Deleuze and Ricoeur.⁶ These readings interpret Spinoza’s substance as dynamic. It could be argued that this explains why the German vitalist tradition is so important to Ricoeur. For as the previous chapter established, German vitalists such as Schelling (and those influenced by Schelling, including Paul Tillich) lie at the heart of the very dynamic tradition within the history of philosophy on which Ricoeur grounds his conviction in a fundamental human capability.

⁵ See, for example, Bennett 1984.

⁶ See Dudley 2007 for the German Idealist reception of Spinoza, as seen especially in the work of Schelling.

2.2 God or Nature

The unique holism of Spinoza's immanent metaphysics inevitably invites charges of pantheism, while his denial of anything remotely approaching the transcendent deity associated with Christian theism has brought charges of atheism in equal measure. The history of both pantheistic and atheistic readings of Spinoza is well-known, and will not be repeated here.⁷ Nevertheless, it is important at this stage to assert that while descriptions of Spinoza as pantheistic are certainly plausible, his pantheism need not carry the pernicious consequences many critics have assumed.⁸ It is also equally important to explain why atheistic readings of Spinoza fail to grasp just how radical his presentation of substance is.

Spinoza's conception of God as a unique substance in which all things inhere has reasonably been interpreted as an avowal of pantheism. In Spinoza's own words:

Except for God, there neither is, nor can be conceived, any substance (by p14), that is (by d3), thing that is in itself and is conceived through itself. But modes (by d5) can neither be nor be conceived without substance. So they can be in the divine nature alone, and can be conceived through it alone. But except for substances and modes there is nothing (by a1). Therefore, [NS: everything is in God and] nothing can be or be conceived without God, q.e.d. (Ip15d).

⁷ An excellent overview is available in Lloyd (1996). For a rigorous defence of Spinoza against the charge of atheism, see Mason (1997).

⁸ The most famous objection to Spinoza's alleged pantheism is found in F.H. Jacobi's *Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza* (1785). Jacobi's *Letters*, which take the form of a series of conversations with G.E. Lessing (who allegedly professed to being a disciple of Spinoza), appeared in the midst of the pantheism debate which raged throughout Germany in the 1780s and 1790s. See Jacobi 1994. See also Smith 2003: 183-190 for a summary of the pantheism debate.

While it is not unreasonable, then, to interpret Spinoza in pantheistic terms, this passage does raise some other difficulties. For if Spinoza's ontological monism is interpreted as strictly pantheistic, it would appear to deny the ontological status of individuals. If everything exists by virtue of its place in divine substance, and thus follows *necessarily* from the nature of divine substance, then human persons become not distinct individuals with discrete identities, but simply modes of divine substance.⁹ It is for this reason that Spinoza's pantheism has been raised as a critical issue; it threatens to undermine individual identity.

In response to this challenge, I maintain that it is possible to preserve individual identity within Spinoza's pantheistic system. Recalling Deleuze's account of attributes and modes, it should be clear that each particular mode *expresses* the substance of which it is a component part. So the desk on which I am writing, as a mode of substance under the attribute of extension, serves this purpose in a particular way that cannot be replicated by any other mode, or amalgamation of modes. Similarly, I, as a human being, am a unique mode of substance – unique not only among other human beings, but among all other modes of substance. Whether conceived under the attribute of thought, as a mind, or under the attribute of extension, as a body, I too express substance in a particular way which cannot be replicated by any other mode, or amalgamation of modes. The individuality of each particular mode or amalgamation of modes, including individual human beings, is thus preserved.

On the other hand, it is easy to see how Spinoza's conception of God or Nature has invited charges of atheism. After all, Spinoza emphatically denies the anthropomorphised conception of God as a willing, thinking deity. Instead, he is adamant that we divest 'God' of all human characteristics.¹⁰ As he argues:

⁹ cf. Smith 2003: 38. Ricoeur also discusses this issue (*OA* 315n.21).

¹⁰ Spinoza's resolute rejection of any anthropomorphic conceptions of God could also be interpreted as a reflection of the formative influence of Jewish philosophy upon his thought. For Jewish influences in Spinoza,

...if will and intellect do pertain to the eternal essence of God, we must of course understand by each of these attributes something different from what men commonly understand. For the intellect and will which would constitute God's essence would have to differ entirely from our intellect and will, and could not agree with them in anything except the name. They would not agree with one another any more than do the dog that is a heavenly constellation and the dog that is a barking animal. (Ip17s2).

A recent example of an atheistic interpretation of Spinoza, which ultimately diverges from this thesis, is Smith's assertion that Spinoza's conception of God or Nature is shorn of any religious reverence. Smith writes:

Deus sive natura is a formula for the atheism that Spinoza either could not or would not admit to...Of course, since the nineteenth century it has become common to regard Spinoza as misunderstood...It is alleged that he may not have been an orthodox theist, but that his 'God or Nature' bespeaks a sense of genuine religious reverence and even awe...I regard this as utterly naïve...God or nature is Spinoza's way of saying that nature is the ground of all things beyond which we need make no further inquiries. It is the place where the buck stops... A close look at what he means by nature in the expression 'God or Nature' should be sufficient to dispel the view that he was a theist of any kind. His view of nature...is utterly void of any kind of purpose for humankind or concern for our well-being. It is hard to imagine what kind of religion could be inspired by the view of God as absolutely indifferent. (Smith 2003: 42-3)

see Scruton 2002, Smith 2003. For Judaism's aversion to anthropomorphism, see Seidler 2007. Ricoeur's comments on Spinoza's rejection of anthropomorphism are found in *OA* 315n.21.

Whatever vision of ‘God’ Spinoza may be presenting, it is, as we have established, certainly nowhere near the God of Christianity. And it is this gulf between the Spinozist God and the Christian God which has persuaded many who read Spinoza that a theistic interpretation of the philosopher simply does not wash. For as A.W. Moore explains, there is ‘an asymmetry here (very roughly, belief in God is most reasonably construed as belief in something that deserves to be called ‘God’ on most reasonable definitions) which makes it altogether less misleading to call Spinoza an atheist than to call him a theist’ (Moore 2011, forthcoming).¹¹

It is probably fair to concede that Spinoza is not a *theist*. But it is unfair to reject any religious reverence for Nature in Spinoza’s account of what he famously refers to as the ‘intellectual love of God.’¹² The image of ‘looking up’ in reverence to a divine creator is clearly incompatible with Spinoza’s denial of a transcendent creator, and his account of Nature as a singular substance in which everything inheres. However, the term ‘reverence’ need not imply a superior being to whom one looks up in worship. The basic definition of reverence includes regarding or treating something with deep respect, admiration or wonder. So in Spinoza’s case, it clearly mirrors the joyful recognition of oneself as part of a greater whole expressed in the ‘intellectual love of God’. This love results from the attainment of the highest level of (human) knowledge, through the power of one’s reasoning, wherein one overcomes the debilitating fictions of the imagination, including the fiction of a transcendent, willing and thinking creator God. This knowledge is achieved, first, by understanding the errors or fictions which make up socially embedded illusions, and second, by exercising an

¹¹ For an alternative reading which argues that Spinoza’s philosophy suggests, on balance, that he was probably a theist, see Bennett (1984).

¹² Although Bennett, defender of Spinoza-as-theist, famously dismisses this particular doctrine as ‘an unmitigated and seemingly unmotivated disaster.’ So aghast is Bennett by this aspect of the *Ethics*, that he elects not to expound its details, ‘as the burden of error and confusion has become unbearable’ (Bennett 1984: 357, 370).

ongoing critique of illusion. This ultimately generates the highest exercise of philosophical thought: the mind's understanding of itself as 'eternal' with the love of God or Nature as its cause.

It would seem, then, that Smith's adamant insistence that Spinoza is an atheist is guilty of a binary presupposition which Spinoza would simply equate with an inadequate level of understanding. To see Spinoza's conception of God or Nature as a straightforward alternative between atheism and theism is to operate with the very fictions that Spinoza's conception of God or Nature seeks to overcome. Clearly, Spinoza cannot be fairly read as either theistic or atheistic. What emerges from the *Ethics* is a metaphysical vision that is integral to life both as we experience it and as we seek to understand it. This metaphysical life is the object of an unmistakably religious reverence, which will be discussed in the remainder of this chapter. Spinoza's religious reverence generates a celebration of the mind's joyful recognition of itself as corporate and part of the unified whole of Nature which expresses an intellectual love.

3. Conatus and Ethical Life

Conatus is Spinoza's concept for an individual thing's striving to persist in being, which is also the very essence of that thing. The identification of a thing's striving to persist in being with its essence may strike the reader as curious, even paradoxical. How can a thing's essence, rather than being what it strives to preserve in order to avoid ceasing to exist, simply consist in *that very striving*?¹³ Recall here that for Spinoza the being of a singular thing consists in its being a determinate mode of substance, mediating and itself mediated by other modes. For

¹³ cf. Lloyd 1996: 74.

such a thing to persist in being is precisely for it to have effects on other things – to exert power, within the totality of modes under a given attribute. What we understand as ‘willing’ is what Spinoza understands as striving, when that striving is related to the human. Problems arise, for Spinoza, when we wrongly construe ‘willing’ as a free, spontaneous cause. This striving, when related to the mind, is for Spinoza the true nature of the ‘will’ (which we wrongly construe as a free, spontaneous cause, and hence free will). When the striving is related to mind and body together, it is called ‘appetite’. Spinoza writes: ‘This appetite, therefore, is nothing but the very essence of man from whose nature there necessarily follow those things that promote his preservation. And so man is determined to do those things’ (IIIp9Schol.).

3.1 Rational Striving

The *conatus* denotes a *rational striving* of each individual body-and-mind to exist fully. And since the *conatus* is at the same time the very essence of human being, to be human is to rationally strive to persist in one’s own being. *Conatus* stands for an individual thing’s endeavour to persevere in being against those un-wise passions to which we are passively subjected though a lack of knowledge; and this perseverance becomes a thing’s very essence. So, individual humanly composed bodies like other individual things persevere by bringing their understanding to bear on their own passions, transforming un-wise passions into active, rational emotions. In other words, power, for Spinoza, is not a matter of raw force; rather it is inextricable from one’s understanding. The greater an individual’s understanding, the more she increases in power (over both her own passions and other modes among whom she exists), and the more fully she expresses her essence as a rational striving being.

Spinoza's conception of human power is bound up with his picture of 'adequate ideas'. 'Our mind does certain things [acts] and undergoes other things, namely, insofar as it has adequate ideas, it necessarily does certain things, and insofar as it has inadequate ideas, it necessarily undergoes other things' (IIIp1). Insofar as a human being is an agent, she is active. Conversely, insofar as she is acted upon by external causes, so far is she passive. Now, Spinoza argues that it is by possessing adequate ideas that human beings advance from passivity to activity; for the mind is active insofar as it is *self-determining* – and thus liberated from the influence of external causes. Adequacy of ideas is thus tantamount to power; the more a human being's ideas are adequate, the more she is independent. This independence is what Spinoza understands as *virtue*: 'by virtue and power I understand the same thing' (IVd8).

On this reading, it becomes apparent that Spinoza conceives reason as a practical *capability* that enables the enhancement of one's power. As Ricoeur puts it, 'the passage from inadequate ideas, which we form about ourselves and about things, to adequate ideas signifies for us the possibility of being truly *active*' (OA 316). In addition, 'this conquest of activity', according to Ricoeur, 'under the aegis of adequate ideas makes [Spinoza's] work as a whole an *ethics*' (OA 316; cf. FP 45-46).¹⁴ For it is through the cultivation of reason, as understanding, and as a practical capability, that the human comes to recognise that she is as inextricably connected to all those other individuals among whom she strives to persevere, as she is to the primordial power – that is substance, God or Nature – of which she is an inextricable and irreplaceable component. In Ricoeur's words:

¹⁴ Ricoeur's interpretation of Spinoza on this point is discussed in chapter 4, section 3.3.

...we are powerful when we understand adequately our, as it were, horizontal and external dependence with respect to all things, and our vertical and immanent dependence with respect to the primordial power that Spinoza continues to name 'God'. (OA 316)

Ricoeur's reading of Spinoza here is far from straightforward, however. Specifically, Ricoeur's suggestion of any kind of 'vertical' relation between substance and its modes might be accused of not taking the notion of expression, as outline above (2.1), seriously enough. For if modes are to be understood, quite literally, as substance *expressing* itself, then surely the language of vertical relations risks implying some sort of transcendence which would be anathema to Spinoza. If this is the case, then serious critical questions must be asked of Ricoeur. Is Ricoeur in danger of deliberately smuggling transcendence through the back door? That is to say, is he not quite prepared to follow Spinoza's account of substance all the way to its radical conclusion? Or does Ricoeur's suggestion of a 'vertical' relation between substance and its modes simply reflect a bad reading of Spinoza which fails to be sufficiently Spinozist itself?¹⁵

Ricoeur's reading of Spinoza certainly raises questions, which will be discussed alongside his readings of Aristotle and Kant (and his attempts to hold the three philosophers together) in subsequent chapters. However, Ricoeur does accurately imply that Spinoza's religious reverence for God or Nature, or 'joy' at being part of God or Nature, cannot be understood apart from the significant ethical dimension of metaphysical life. Power comes from understanding ourselves in relation to God or Nature, which applies as much to our

¹⁵ It might be countered, in Ricoeur's defence, that at no stage does he refer explicitly to transcendence. Indeed, what makes the passage so puzzling is his description of our relation to God as 'vertical *and immanent*' (OA 316. Emphasis added). So ironically, Ricoeur might be accused not of smuggling the language of transcendence into his interpretation of Spinoza, but simply of positing an outright contradiction which he fails to resolve. While interesting in and of itself, a discussion of the possible meaning behind Ricoeur's reference to 'vertical and immanent' dependence lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

relation to the whole of which we are a part as to our relation to those around us (our ‘horizontal and external dependence with respect to all things’). It is for this reason that Spinoza’s ethics must ultimately be understood as an expression of religion as metaphysical life.

3.2 Understanding Life

Spinoza’s picture of adequate ideas transforming passivity into activity, and so power, is crucial in order to understand his moral psychology. For Spinoza’s picture suggests that his rationalism does not amount to an arbitrary divide between active, adequate reasoning and passive, irrational emotions. Instead, Spinoza draws a significant distinction between emotions and passions. Spinoza does not denounce emotions, in and of themselves. Indeed, he positively endorses certain emotions insofar as they are compatible with rational activity; that is, insofar as we adequately understand them. Passions, on the other hand, are emotions to which we are passive, over which we have no control, because we do not adequately understand them.¹⁶ Adequate ideas are essential to Spinoza’s presentation of activity precisely because by gaining in knowledge *of* our emotions, we gain control *over* our emotions.¹⁷ We become *active* in respect of our emotions as our passions are transformed.¹⁸ In Spinoza’s

¹⁶ Kant offers a similar presentation of ‘passion’ in the *Anthropology*, which he distinguishes from ‘affect’. Although Kant’s emphasis differs from Spinoza’s (affect being described as ‘surprise through sensation’ whose impact is temporary; ‘passion’ being a deeper, lasting state), the similarity in his depiction and denouncement of passion is not inconsiderable. Passions, he tells us, are ‘deceitful and hidden’, to the extent that ‘no human being wishes to have passion. For who wants to have himself put in chains when he can be free?’ (*Anth.* 7: 252-3).

¹⁷ A critical question could be raised here, which lies beyond the scope of this thesis. If, in line with much recent work in moral psychology, we understand emotions to be cognitive (i.e. involving both rational and visceral elements), is it really possible to ‘control’ them in the way Spinoza seems to be suggesting? It might be fair to say that emotions can still be cultivated (along an Aristotelian model), but to suggest that they can be controlled surely implies a false dualism between reason and the emotions.

¹⁸ This aspect of Spinoza’s thought has been criticised by some feminists, and not without reason. For example, Spinoza cautions men specifically to avoid pity, since pity is an ‘effeminate’ or ‘womanish’ emotion (cf. Lloyd 1996: 157-9). In other words, pity is something undergone and as such obstructs the transition of passions to actions; it blocks the education of the emotions, and more generally, hinders life’s *conatus*. Thus, Spinoza

words, ‘an emotion which is a passion ceases to be a passion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it’ (Vp3).¹⁹

There is a strong hermeneutic dimension to this conception of human activity and emotions that clearly resonates with Ricoeur’s own hermeneutic phenomenology.²⁰ For it seems plausible that an adequate understanding of one’s emotions will enable greater control over one’s emotions and, consequently, one’s emotional reactions to the world around them. If, for example, I understand adequately that hatred is, more often than not, a self-defeating passion that impedes me in many significant ways, and is often borne out of a misunderstanding of the object(s) of hatred, then I can confront and control potential upheavals of hatred so that they do not impede me. I may, for example, find myself overcome with anger at the commuter who inexplicably snarls and sniggers cruelly at me as I board the bus every morning. I then learn that the commuter is neither snarling nor sniggering, but in fact suffers from an uncontrollable twitch which happens to manifest itself in facial expressions that resemble, to an uncanny degree, snarls and sniggers (and cruel ones at that). Realising, then, that I have been mistaken, that I have misunderstood the commuter,

returns us to the point that a thing is free when it ‘exists solely from the necessity of its own nature, and is determined to action by itself alone’ (Id7). This suggests a non-relational, atomistic autonomy, and is thus ultimately unhelpful for those feminists who seek a gender-inclusive picture of both an individual body and a collective life. It also seems to run against those readings of Spinoza which see him precisely as a counterpoint to atomistic, neo-Kantian liberal political philosophies which stress the autonomy of the individual.

¹⁹ Lloyd observes that Spinoza’s treatment of the passions re-words ethical and metaphysical ideas drawn from ancient Stoicism. For the Stoics the virtuous mind is devoid of passion, though it acts from a rational, non-passionate form of desire and experiences a rational joy. For Spinoza too we are virtuous to the extent that we are free of passion. Where Spinoza departs from the Stoic vision is in his insistence that it is through understanding the passions themselves that we attain freedom. ‘Rather than looking to reason as an alternative source of motivation to the harmful passions – turning away, as it were, from passion – the virtuous mind attains freedom by bringing its understanding to bear on its own passions, transforming them into active, rational emotions. It is not by shunning the passions, but by accepting their necessity and attempting to understand their operations, that we become virtuous and free’ (Lloyd 1996: 9-10).

²⁰ See Ricoeur 1981 for an account of his hermeneutic phenomenology. The term ‘hermeneutic phenomenology’ was originally coined in Don Ihde’s (1971) study of Ricoeur’s philosophy.

the source of my anger, I am able to control my anger in the knowledge that it is baseless.²¹ Adequate understanding, in short, enables me to be in control of my emotions. And this ensures that my ethical conduct will not be impeded by passional states that so often stem from inadequate understanding, whether of the source of the passion or the object of the passion. Consequently, Spinoza's conception of the free person is one who *avoids* hatred, envy, contempt, and other negative emotions; she is unaffected by fear and superstition; she is secure in the knowledge that virtue is power and power is freedom, and freedom is happiness. 'A free man', says Spinoza, 'thinks of nothing less than of death, and his wisdom is a meditation not on death but on *life*' (IVp17. Emphasis added).

3.3 Ethical Life

Spinoza's *Ethics* can therefore be described as endorsing activity, which is synonymous with the fullest expression of *conatus*, of rational striving, of human being. In Ricoeur's terms, as a cognitive-conative capability, *conatus* describes the fundamental powers of the human as a rational, striving being. Recalling Ricoeur's appropriation of Spinoza, the human is inextricably bound both by a 'vertical and immanent' dependence upon the ground or source of her powers and a 'horizontal and external' dependence upon those with and among whom she is embedded in concrete communities (cf. *OA* 316).²²

This latter point is important, for it serves to counter the charge of egoism that has been levelled at Spinoza's *conatus*. For example, it has been argued that the *conatus*, as a fundamental (rational) desire to persevere in one's own being, naturally yields an ethic centred

²¹ Admittedly, to do this is often easier said than done, and it might be argued that what we have here is a rather exceptional example. What if the sniggerer is in fact sniggering? What would be the suitable course of action in those circumstances? Could I still control my emotions? Or would Spinoza not expect me to, arguing that it would be an instance of appropriate and appropriately-directed anger? Surely not, if anger is a passion which I cannot fully control?

²² Although this again raises the critical spectre raised in section 3.1 concerning Ricoeur's reading of Spinoza.

on the individual's whims and fancies, where any suggestion of a collaborative ethic can be reduced to an instrumental means of self-interest. There are undoubtedly passages in the *Ethics* that support such an interpretation. In part III, Spinoza goes so far as to claim that our ideas of the good are constructed out of our actual strivings and appetites. Rather than striving for things because we judge them to be good, 'we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it' (IIIp9S; cf. Lloyd 1996: 74). It is for this reason that Jonathan Bennett dismisses the vision of collaborative morality in part IV of the *Ethics* which, he claims, cannot be reconciled with the overt doctrine of egoism that runs through the rest of the text. Indeed, he argues, attempts to reconcile the two are as 'remarkable' as they are incoherent (Bennett 1984: 299-307).

However, Bennett's reading misses the dynamic character of *conatus*, which binds and embeds human activity in concrete communities.²³ For if *conatus* is a matter of power, and if to persist in being is necessarily to exert causal power on some modes, and also to be acted upon by others, then the relation between self and others becomes something quite different from the conventional model of interaction between independently existing, individual entities.²⁴ Spinoza's point is not that an individual – identifiable independently of its relations with others – necessarily pursues its own interests rather than those of others. It is rather that what it is to be an individual is to be both determined to act through the mediation of other modes and likewise to determine others. As we will discover, this significantly shapes the later Ricoeur's reflexive account of autonomy. Bennett, however, appears guilty of projecting an atomistic account of the individual onto Spinoza which clashes with the conception we find in the *Ethics*.

²³ Although, as mentioned above (2.1), there is some disagreement over whether Spinoza's monism ought to be interpreted in dynamic or static terms. While this thesis urges the former, Bennett argues for the latter.

²⁴ Lloyd 1996: 75

The argument of this chapter is that Spinoza's *conatus* be read not as a source of egoism, but of ethical life as, in Ricoeur's terms, 'aiming at the good life, *with and for others*, in just institutions' (OA 172. Emphasis added). This *conatus* overturns the conventional distinction between individual self-interest and communal goods. Instead, Spinoza understands the collective powers and affinities of human beings. What human beings can achieve in collaboration far outstrips what they as individuals are capable of in isolation. So if the pursuit of ethical life is, for Spinoza, tantamount to the pursuit of power, this will best be achieved in collaboration 'with and for others'.

4. Spinoza in the Later Ricoeur

This section will make explicit the parallels between Ricoeur's conception of the capable human and Spinoza's *conatus*, both of which reveal a certain metaphysical quality of human being. Both conceive of human being in terms of an effort to persevere in being (OA 316); both conceive of human beings as particular dynamic expressions of a greater power of which they are inextricable and irreplaceable components and expressions. Accordingly, it is plausible to claim that Ricoeur's conviction in God, Nature or Life as that which binds humans together as capable beings, is grounded in a reading of Spinoza's metaphysics. As Ricoeur explains: 'I am not sure about the absolute irreconcilability between the God of the Bible and the God of Being (understood with...Spinoza as "*substantia actuosa*")' (Ricoeur 2004a: 169).²⁵

Further parallels can be traced between Spinoza's intellectual love of God as a 'third kind of knowledge', and Ricoeur's hermeneutics. Spinoza calls this knowledge *scientia intuitiva*.

²⁵ cf. Introduction, section 2.5.

However, this term does not have to be translated as knowledge. Instead, it can refer to a third level of *understanding*. For the intellectual love of God results not from knowledge of the direct and infallible kind, but rather from the deepest possible understanding of one's surroundings. Once I understand that I am a particular mode, which I currently conceive under a particular attribute of the one, infinite, eternal substance, I consequently arrive at the intellectual love that is Spinoza's equivalent to religious reverence. And this account of understanding is clearly mirrored in the later Ricoeur's account of the aims of hermeneutic reflection. In Ricoeur's own words:

The ultimate purpose of hermeneutic reflection and attestation, as I see it, is to try to retrace the line of intentional capacity and action behind mere objects (which we tend to focus on exclusively in our natural attitude) so that we may recover the hidden truth of our operative acts, of *being capable*, of being *un homme capable*. So if hermeneutics is right, in the wake of Kant and Gadamer, to stress the finitude and limits of consciousness, it is also wise to remind ourselves of the tacit potencies and acts of our lived existence. (Ricoeur 2004a: 167)

For Ricoeur, hermeneutic reflection requires that we scrutinise the presuppositions inherent in our 'natural attitude'²⁶ in order to arrive at a deeper level of analysis that will ultimately result in a greater understanding both of ourselves and the whole of which we are a part.²⁷ This echoes Spinoza's attempt, in the *Ethics*, to free human beings from the self-incurred 'bondage' of ignorance through the attainment of higher levels of understanding. Likewise, Ricoeur's emphasis on the 'tacit potencies and acts of our lived existence' alludes to

²⁶ 'Natural attitude' should not be understood here in a Husserlian sense, but rather in terms of recovering whatever lies behind our operative acts in a *metaphysical* sense.

²⁷ For a discussion of hermeneutic reflection in Ricoeur, see chapter 4, section 2.

the dynamic nature of Spinoza's *conatus* as a persistent striving that is at the same time the very essence of human being. In the context of the above quote, then, Ricoeur finds a means of exploring the 'hidden truth' of ethical life, and of being a capable human subject.

There is plenty of explicit evidence in Ricoeur's texts for the parallels being drawn above. For example, Ricoeur's conviction in the metaphysical source of human actions can be traced back to *Oneself as Another*, where he discusses Spinoza. To quote Ricoeur, 'it is in man that *conatus*, or the power of being of all things, is most clearly readable' (*OA* 316). In striving to persist in its own being, there is a power in *conatus* which expresses the infinite power of which the human being is an irreplaceable and inextricable component. In particular, Ricoeur's metaphysical conviction of human capability includes the deeper, infinite power that Spinoza calls God or Nature.

Ricoeur continues that the capable human is not the only window onto God or Nature. He argues: 'everything expresses to different degrees the power or life that Spinoza calls the life of God' (*OA* 317). This infinite power can be expressed in a multitude of ways, a conviction Ricoeur draws from Spinoza's assertion that each and every mode of substance is at that same time a particular expression of infinite, eternal substance.²⁸

For another example, Ricoeur draws from Spinoza's immanent metaphysics a means of conceiving 'God and being in terms of each other' (Ricoeur 2004a: 169). Indeed, it is this aspect of Spinoza that marks his most significant contribution to Ricoeur's moral religion – for it is what renders ethics and religion ultimately inseparable. If religion is a matter of revering the infinite power that lies behind human capacities, then each and every human being, as an inextricable and irreplaceable expression and component of that infinite power,

²⁸ It is interesting that Ricoeur also locates a (different) plurality of meanings of being in the Hebrew Bible, specifically in Exodus 3:14. This raises the question as to what impact this tradition may have had upon Spinoza's thought, given his familiarity with Jewish philosophy (see note 10, above). For a discussion of Ricoeur's use of Exodus, see Introduction, section 2.5.

is rendered sacred. Ethical life, as aiming at the good life with and for others among whom we are embedded as expressions and components of that infinite power, therefore becomes a matter of, in effect, practicing that reverence (cf. *OA* 172 ff.).

The question that remains is whether Ricoeur can in fact realise this particular conception of religion for ethical life. For as will be seen, Kant's moral religion also shapes Ricoeur's hermeneutics of ethical life,²⁹ and it remains unclear at this stage whether religion as metaphysical life in Spinoza is compatible with religion as moral life in Kant. Is a post-Kantian reading of Spinoza possible that does not fall prey to the pitfalls encountered by Bennett, for example? Is a post-Kantian reading of Spinoza possible that stays true to the spirit of Spinoza? Is a post-Kantian Spinozism, in other words, plausible? The answer will depend on whether there is a particular reading of both Spinoza and Kant that succeeds in rendering them both compatible while remaining true to their respective philosophical positions. This obviously raises the added question of what we take their philosophical positions to be. And this in turn raises questions about the nature of hermeneutics, of reading philosophical texts – specifically, how one reads the history of philosophy, and how one relates or adapts ideas drawn from the history of philosophy to contemporary concerns (if indeed one can at all). This and related issues will be discussed at the end of this chapter (section 6) and also substantially in chapter 4. These questions are all of critical importance not only for Ricoeur's post-Kantian engagement with Spinoza, but for the viability of his post-Hegelian Kantian moral religion generally.

²⁹ See chapter 3.

5. Spinoza and Kant

5.1 Freedom

The biggest single difference between Spinoza and Kant, which is potentially problematic for Ricoeur, lies in their competing accounts of human freedom. Kant famously goes to great lengths to defend a conception of human freedom as willing. We would not be free, argues Kant, without the power of choice between alternatives which he calls *Willkür* – a power that lies in every human will. Crucially, for Kant, *Willkür* is distinct from being determined by the causal laws of the phenomenal world, as a domain for *free* choice.³⁰ Spinoza, by contrast, claims that the very concept of a free will rests on a mistake. Spinoza does not deny our capacity to act as free agents, but he does deny that such freedom derives from an unconstrained will. Free actions are not the product of the will, but of the *understanding*. The greater our understanding of ourselves and the world around us, the greater our freedom.

We thus find in Spinoza a strong affirmation of freedom accompanied by an equally strong repudiation of free will.³¹ Spinoza is chiefly concerned with what he sees as the distorted understanding of the nature of our freedom. The belief in free will is, for Spinoza, an illusion which, ironically, diminishes our actual freedom – an illusion that human beings are somehow exempt from the necessities that govern the rest of nature.³² Spinoza thus poses a radical challenge to our everyday presuppositions about freedom which, Lloyd argues, are informed by ‘assumptions of modernity...which reflect theological preoccupations with divine and human will which Spinoza repudiated’ (Gatens & Lloyd 1999: 41). To understand

³⁰ cf. Chapter 3, section 2.1.

³¹ cf. Gatens & Lloyd 1999: 41.

³² Although Kant, too, expresses concern over illusion, namely, the illusion that any knowledge of freedom is possible. For Kant, while freedom can be *thought*, it *cannot* be known.

this is to be free, because to understand clearly is to be active, as opposed to passively undergoing the power of an external cause.

It would seem, therefore, that Spinoza's repudiation of free will renders him entirely incompatible with Kant who, by contrast, avidly defends *both* natural causation *and* the freedom of the will. However, upon closer inspection, this need not necessarily be the case. To begin with, in asserting his conception of freedom as understanding, Spinoza maintains that there are at least two different and irreducible conceptual vocabularies, stemming from the two attributes accessible to the human intellect, thought and extension: a language of minds with reasons and purposes and a language of bodies in motion. So the human being, as a mode of substance, is a totality. But this totality can be conceived either as a mind, under the attribute of thought, or as a body, under the attribute of extension. This is Spinoza's parallelism,³³ and it bears a remarkable similarity to Kant's two-aspect account of human freedom.³⁴

Kant is adamant that every event in the physical world is completely determined by antecedent physical causes. Moreover, he holds that this determinism is completely incompatible with a spontaneous human freedom, where that freedom is defined as the ability to act independently of external causes – the very conception of freedom he wishes to defend. Kant's solution to this incompatibility is to argue that a single event can be both

³³ Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism argues that mind and body, thought and extension, are parallel but independent; each obeying its own sphere of causality. There is not causal relation between thought and extension, merely a correlation. A change in the state of my body, as a mode under the attribute of extension, will not cause a change in the state of my mind, as a mode under the attribute of thought. The world of bodies and the world of minds are not two different worlds, but the *same* world, described from two different points of view (cf. Smith 2003: 64). Hence Spinoza's assertion that 'the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things' (IIp7). (It should be noted that 'parallelism' is not Spinoza's term; it seems to have been coined by Leibniz, who used it to designate a correspondence between autonomous or independent series [Deleuze 1990: 107-111; Smith 2003: 65]). The tensions that arise between Spinoza's ontological monism and his parallelism are well known and will not be discussed here. For a full discussion of this tension, see Della Rocca (1996).

³⁴ On the distinction between two-aspect and two-world interpretations of Kant's account of human freedom, see Gardner 1999: 290-305. For a defence of the two-aspect interpretation, see Allison 1983. For a defence of the two-world interpretation, see Aquila 1979.

completely determined by antecedent physical causes, when considered from one point of view, and free, when considered from another. A single event can be viewed from two different aspects or, as Moore puts it, ‘the determinism and the libertarianism to which [Kant] is committed...hold from different points of view’ (Moore 2003: 99).³⁵ Moore elaborates:

The point seems to be that, just as certain marks on a sheet of paper can be regarded now as strokes and squiggles and now as writing conveying a message, so too your reaching the end of your deliberations can be regarded now as your brain’s coming to be reconfigured in a certain way as a result of a complex concatenation of physical causes and now as your arriving at a particular judgement as a result of ratiocination. When you balk at the idea that your verdict is *nothing but* the product of physical processes in your brain, it is because you have your own (alternative) view of the matter whereby, in exercising certain concepts, you have an (alternative) sense of *why* you arrived at that verdict. (Moore 2003: 100).³⁶

Kant’s argument is not without its consequences. Amongst other things, the price he pays for safeguarding human freedom from the threat of determinism is to concede that such freedom can never be established as a matter of knowledge. But the point is that if we accept Kant’s two-aspect account, Spinoza’s assertion that humans are not exempt from the necessities that govern the laws of nature still holds. Indeed, it is an assertion that Kant will uphold, insofar as he conceives human beings under the deterministic aspect of the laws of nature. Kant’s conception of true human freedom is ultimately a matter of acting according to reason: we are truly free when we act according to the moral law of our own rational

³⁵ For more on Kant’s ‘unconventional compatibilism’, see Wood 1984.

³⁶ For a full discussion of the difficulties inherent in Kant’s view – and possible resolutions – see Moore 2003: 90-146.

nature which we have legislated by ourselves for ourselves. This too could be interpreted sympathetically in relation to Spinoza's assertion that our freedom is ultimately determined by the clarity of our understanding, where this 'understanding' comes closer to the clarity of thinking in Kant.

5.2 The Individual

In stark contrast to Kant's assertive defence of the autonomy of the individual, there is a real sense in which Spinoza's monism undermines our status as individual willing, thinking agents.

Roger Scruton is adamant here:

Spinoza's monism generates a highly paradoxical idea of the human person. The individual person is not, it seems, an individual at all. Nor is anything else. The identity, separateness, and self-sufficiency of the person all seem to be denied by Spinoza, and man, as part of nature, seems to be no more important a feature in the scheme of things than are rocks and stones and trees. (Scruton 2002: 56).

It is certainly true that the idea of my individuality pales when considered in the context of the one individual substance. Nevertheless, contrary to the above concern, Spinoza's system *does* leave room for conceiving of the human being as an individual. This can be illustrated by recalling Spinoza's conception of *conatus*.

Spinoza identifies *conatus* with the very being of finite things. The essence of each individual thing *is* its *conatus*, whether that thing is a stick, stone, rock, tree, or human being. Spinoza thus retains a minimal conception of the individual that resists collapsing into a single unitary vision of substance. Human beings may be as much a part of substance as

sticks, stones, rocks or trees, but this does not undermine the individuality of each and every human being (expressed by its *conatus*), any more than it undermines the individuality of particular sticks or stones. Each mode expresses in a *particular* way the infinite, eternal substance of which it is a component part. So, recalling the example above (2.2), the desk on which I am writing, as a mode of substance under the attribute of extension, serves this purpose in a particular way that cannot be replicated by any other mode, or amalgamation of modes. There may be no *qualitative* difference between humans and, say, trees, but the *individuality* of each particular mode, or amalgamation of modes, *including individual human beings*, is preserved.

This conception of the individual has a significant consequence for readers of Spinoza after Kant. For while it preserves the Kantian conception of the individual, it situates that individual – as an active, striving, conative mode of substance – among like others. To be an individual, in other words, is to be both determined to act through the mediation of other modes and likewise to determine other modes. As Gatens and Lloyd have commented, Spinoza ‘allows the modern preoccupation with autonomous individual selfhood to reconnect with ideals of community, without thereby collapsing hard-won individuality into an all-encompassing, pre-existing collective identity’ (Gatens & Lloyd 1999: 2). So if Spinoza ultimately preserves the individuality so dear to Kantians, that individuality cannot now be separated from its embeddedness in a particular community of interdependent human beings. Spinoza offers a means of modifying Kantian individuality to account for the very factors of lived experience which Kant is so often criticised for having overlooked, including

embodiment, vulnerability, and socio-cultural conditions.³⁷ This will prove crucial to Ricoeur's account of reflexive autonomy, which is discussed in chapter 4.

5.3 Ethology

Unlike Kant, Spinoza's conception of ethics is to be clearly distinguished from a 'morality'. Spinoza is not concerned with normative principles, prohibitive 'oughts' or transcendental values. As Deleuze argues, Spinoza sees goodness as 'a matter of dynamism, power and the composition of powers' (Deleuze 1988: 17-29). The *Ethics* is an exploration of the possibilities for strengthening the powers of bodies through composition. The ethical possibilities of life come from the possibilities of joining forces with whatever agrees with our own nature in power-strengthening unions characterised by joy. It is for this reason that Deleuze, in distinguishing Spinoza's ethics from morality, goes so far as to conceive it as an 'ethology': a study of relations of individual and collective capacities for affecting and being affected (cf. Lloyd 1996: 134).

Ethology reflects the reality of human beings living with and among others, describing the various powers of beings in relational terms by treating an individual as a fully integrated part of the context in which she lives and moves. In other words, ethology explores how human capacities, both for affecting and being affected, are determined to a large extent by the circumstances in which a human being finds herself. Each individual exists in relations of interdependence with other individuals, and these relations form a 'world' in which individuals of all kinds exchange their constitutive parts, leading to the enhancement

³⁷ Although as chapters 3 and 4 will argue, this criticism is not entirely fair on Kant. It is probably more accurate to say that because Kant is *so* aware of the vulnerability that comes from our embodiment and socio-cultural conditions, he goes to extraordinary lengths to minimise their impact upon the moral life.

of some and the demise of others.³⁸ An ethological reading of Spinoza is thus of great importance to Ricoeur's post-Hegelian Kantian enterprise. For it enables us to trace how a fundamental human *capability* – that generic, metaphysical quality of being human – becomes manifested in particular, concrete human *capacities*. Moreover, owing both to the dependence on context and the interdependence of situated human beings, these particular capacities are highly vulnerable. Fundamental capability, in other words, can be manifested as a capacity or as an incapacity, depending on circumstance. And this is a fact that Ricoeur will accuse Kant, with his extensive focus on the inner world of human willing, of overlooking. For surely no inner world is completely immune to external damage? (It will be discovered that this is something that even Aristotle concedes).³⁹ The role of ethics, then, is to ensure that the constitutional vulnerability to misfortune of particular individuals does not result in a gross dissymmetry in human relations, that human beings collaborate in their pursuit of the good in life without isolating particular vulnerable individuals. It is for this reason that Ricoeur will eventually turn to a Kantian 'moral norm' as a means of regulating self-other relations that can all-too-easily manifest in a dissymmetry which leads to violence.⁴⁰ Consequently, as will be discovered, Ricoeur's hermeneutics of ethical life incorporates *both* Aristotelian anthropology *and* Kantian morality, underlined by a Spinozist metaphysics.

At the same time, an ethological reading of Spinoza modifies Kantian individuality further, by revealing also the more *positive* dimension of human interdependence. For while one inevitable consequence of interdependence is an inescapable vulnerability to those around us, an accompanying consequence is the possibility for collaboration. Part II of the *Ethics* makes it clear that human existence, as modal existence, cannot help but be reliant on

³⁸ cf. Gatens & Lloyd 1999: 100-101.

³⁹ Chapter 2, section 3.2.

⁴⁰ cf. chapter 4, section 5.2.

things outside itself. Moira Gatens argues that human being is not a ‘dominion within a dominion’, but fully part of nature and bound by its laws. So if the natural right enjoyed by one individual is to avoid being cancelled out by the natural right of another (this is, after all, a primary reason for the prohibitive nature of Kant’s deontology), then it may do so by *combining forces* with individuals of the same, or similar nature (Gatens & Lloyd: 102). In Spinoza’s own words:

[When] two individuals of entirely the same nature are joined to one another, they compose an individual twice as powerful as each one. To man, then, there is nothing more useful than man. Man, I say, can wish for nothing more helpful to the preservation of his being than all should so agree in all things that the Minds and Bodies of all would compose, as it were, one Mind and one Body; that all should strive together, as far as they can, to preserve their being, and that all, together, should seek for themselves the common advantage of all (IVp18Schol.).

For Spinoza, then, the human’s greatest opportunity to flourish lies in cooperation with other humans. A group of individuals has a collective power that exceeds their powers as individuals. We achieve in collaboration what we could never achieve in isolation. And for readers of Spinoza after Kant, this yields an entirely modified, reflexive conception of autonomy – one that will be found to lie at the heart of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of ethical life (chapter 4). However, a final question remains: what are the consequences of bringing Spinoza and Kant into collaboration? The answer will depend, to a large degree, on what one takes to be involved in reading philosophy.

6. Coda: Reading Philosophy

The next few paragraphs explain my understanding of the reading of the history of philosophy, and the significance of Ricoeur's contribution to this task. My understanding is hermeneutic, but it also has certain affinities with Richard Rorty's critical reconstructionism.

In an important paper on the 'Historiography of Philosophy', Rorty distinguishes between 'past-centered' and 'present-centered' approaches to the history of philosophy. While past-centered approaches understand past philosophers in their own terms, and in relation to their own agendas, present-centered approaches involve a 'rational reconstruction' of past philosophers' arguments – an exercise, Gatens and Lloyd comment, 'guided by the hope of treating the mighty dead as colleagues with whom they can engage in philosophical debate' (Gatens & Lloyd 1999: 7; cf. Rorty 1984). The contrast between the two alternatives, Rorty argues, does not really constitute a dilemma: we should do both of these things, but do them separately. Good history of philosophy needs to try both to reconstruct the conversations past philosophers might have had with their peers, and to bring them into our own contemporary philosophical debates (Gatens & Lloyd 1999: 7). It should also, I might add, undertake a third attempt; namely, to bring past philosophers into conversation with one another, for the sake of enhancing our contemporary philosophical debates. This is the enterprise attempted in the present thesis with Spinoza and Kant and, as the next chapter will discuss, with Aristotle too. It is also an enterprise boldly undertaken, so this thesis argues, by Ricoeur.

Ricoeur's hermeneutics certainly incorporates both past- and present-centered approaches to philosophical texts. Indeed, he combines the two as he moves back and forth between the contextual concerns of respective philosophers and contemporary debates. But he also undertakes the third approach outlined above, moving back and forth between two

respective philosophers in the attempt to generate a positive outcome through bringing their seemingly opposed views into conversation. As this chapter has argued, and as chapter 4 will argue further, Ricoeur attempts to bring Spinoza and Kant into conversation in order that the two might mutually enhance and benefit one another. Of course, the product of such an engagement, particularly when it is undertaken as a means of developing one's own constructive project (as it is both for Ricoeur, and the particular reading of Ricoeur put forward in this thesis), will be a modified reading of one, if not both, of the respective figures involved. And this is certainly the case in Ricoeur's engagement with Spinoza and Kant – most notably, a considerable modification of Kant's conception of the individual.

This then raises the question as to how much modifying is really necessary? If it is necessary to modify particular philosophers in order to render them compatible, then why bring them into conversation in the first place? And if the conversation results in a modified version of one, if not both, of the respective philosophers, can this result still be said in any way to actually represent the arguments of these philosophers? There are doubtless those who would argue that such a project is self-defeating, but this is to miss the objective of hermeneutics as it is practised by Ricoeur, among others. For hermeneutics is fundamentally a matter of *interpretation*. In this case, it is a matter of how one interprets (particular figures in) the history of philosophy. And interpretation, by definition, is never a matter of a straightforward, literal reading (if such a thing ever existed – particularly in the case of Spinoza and Kant!). It is about getting behind texts, exposing presuppositions and, crucially, of unearthing hitherto unforeseen meanings contained within the text. The result may well be a modified presentation of one or both of the respective philosophers in question. But what is modified is merely the conventional interpretation – our presuppositions – of said philosophers. Ricoeur therefore challenges our presuppositions both in his reading of

Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant, and in his use of all three to inform his architectonic of moral religion. And challenging presuppositions is precisely what this thesis aims to do in reading Ricoeur; in reading Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant in Ricoeur; and in deriving an architectonic of moral religion from Ricoeur's hermeneutics of ethical life.

CHAPTER TWO

RELIGION AS ANTHROPOLOGICAL LIFE IN ARISTOTLE

‘If the good and happy man needs friends, it is because friendship is an “activity” (*energeia*)...Under the aegis of need, a link is made between activity and life and, finally, between happiness and pleasure. Friendship, therefore, works toward establishing the conditions for the realisation of life, considered in its *intrinsic goodness and its basic pleasure*.’

(Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 186).

This chapter engages with Aristotle’s influence on Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of ethical life. It teases out an Aristotelian account of the good life as essentially a study of human life and its end.¹ In other words, it focuses on anthropological life in Aristotle’s ethics, while building on the metaphysics of a fundamental human capability discussed in the previous chapters. This chapter also proceeds by way of a critical hermeneutic, elucidating specific passages in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* concerning human life and the cultivation of human capacities. It will be argued that Aristotle furnishes Ricoeur’s project with an anthropology, linking fundamental human capability to particular, concrete capacities.²

¹ Instead of a study of ‘man’s life’ I will employ the term ‘anthropological life’. This is also relevant for the current research among philosophers and phenomenologists of religion into the anthropology of religion.

² For example, practical reasoning, speech, and action are included among these human capacities.

Aristotle enables us to recognise the extent to which human capacities are a matter of fortune. What is manifested as a capacity could just as easily have been an incapacity, depending on a host of factors beyond the agent's control. Moreover, even if an agent is constitutionally and circumstantially fortunate enough to develop certain capacities, she will remain vulnerable to changes in her physical or social environment; changes which are potentially damaging to human capacities.

Aristotle, like Spinoza, represents a considerable break from standard Kantian conceptions of human relations. Whether in Spinoza's corporate conception of human life, or in Aristotle's assertion that a good human life is inconceivable without the good of friendship, both offer a portrayal of human relationality which will provide Ricoeur with a much richer basis for developing his hermeneutics of ethical life than he could gain from Kant alone.

There are four overlapping aims to this chapter. First, a broad overview of Aristotle's anthropology is set in relation to Spinoza's metaphysics. Second, Aristotle's concept of *eudaimonia*, or the good human life, is assessed, alongside his account of the role played by *orexis*, or desire, in moral deliberation, which also overlaps in crucial respects with Spinoza's concept of *conatus*. Third, a detailed discussion of the human pursuit of the good life will lead to an extended assessment of vulnerability, including the vulnerability of human capacities. Finally, friendship's status as an external – and, as such, unstable – good for human life is treated in the general context of Aristotle's anthropology, and Ricoeur's hermeneutics of ethical life. This will lay the ground for chapter 3: 'Religion as Moral Life in Kant', but will also be more fully understood in the discussion of Ricoeur's reflexive conception of autonomy in chapter 4.

1. Aristotle's Anthropology

This section aims to reread Aristotle with the help of Ricoeur's hermeneutics, in light of the previous chapter's engagement with Spinoza. Like Spinoza, Aristotle conceives of human living as characterised by a certain kind of striving. But unlike Spinoza, who presents human striving in terms of a desire simply to persist in being, Aristotle conceives of this human striving in more strictly teleological terms: to be human is to strive *for a particular end*.³ Aristotle describes the end (*telos*) of this striving as *eudaimonia*, or the 'good life'. To be human is to naturally strive for this elusive end.⁴ Like Spinoza, Aristotle also highlights the acute vulnerability of an embodied, socially-situated human life. The twin capacity to affect and to be affected not only by others, but by the natural world we inhabit, makes us vulnerable.

In emphasising human vulnerability in his account of ethical virtue, Aristotle demonstrates that the good life is not easily or quickly achieved. Goodness, as virtue, must be properly cultivated. Briefly, Aristotelian virtues are character states which dispose agents to the wisely chosen actions that contribute to the good life. So the good life necessitates the cultivation of dispositions for right action. Yet all of this requires prosperity and luck. Simply to act from virtue unimpeded requires that the world be in some way hospitable to the virtuous agent.⁵ In other words, virtuous activity cannot take place in isolation from the external world. External goods are necessary for a fully good life. Success in the world is contingent upon propitious conditions and external resources or goods (*NE* 1099a32-b5).

³ By 'particular end', I mean an end that is distinctively human (i.e. an end that is *particular to* the human).

⁴ For an extended discussion of the pursuit of *eudaimonia* as an unattainable end or elusive goal, see Lear 2000: 1-60. See also Ricoeur, *OA* 172: 'the good is not contained in any particular thing. The good is rather that which is lacking in all things.'

⁵ Sherman 1997: 5.

It gradually becomes apparent that Aristotle's anthropology involves human agents, human dispositions, the external world, and ultimately a much larger metaphysical reality. Human nature is part of a larger (metaphysical) nature. Aristotle is adamant that in order to understand human action, we must also understand nature *as a whole*. This raises two hermeneutic points. First, our interpretation of Aristotle approaches that of Spinoza. Recall that Spinoza conceives the human as a particular mode of the one infinite substance. Similarly, for Aristotle, the human is an inextricable and irreplaceable part of the whole of nature.⁶

Second, in rereading Aristotle after Spinoza, our conception of nature may look different from those of modern science. Crucially, nature is read in terms of the potentialities of humans to develop in certain ways.⁷ This reading rests on an implicit distinction in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, articulated by both Julia Annas and John McDowell, between 'mere' nature and 'second' nature (Annas 1993: 142-158; McDowell 1995).⁸ Mere nature denotes what we start with, what is unchanging in us as human beings. Second nature, on the other hand, is something whose realisation involves developing beyond mere nature.⁹ The purported distinction between these two 'natures' has run into difficulties with modern commentators who allege that Aristotle is seeking to ground ethics on an understanding of nature that is simply incompatible with the (more reliable) framework bequeathed to us by

⁶ See *Metaphysics* IV.1-3. As Lear's account of the *Metaphysics* demonstrates, there are striking parallels between Aristotle's metaphysical account of the human's place in the world, and Spinoza's, particularly concerning the privileged place given to the understanding: '...as man comes to understand the broad structure of reality, there is no longer any firm distinction to be made between 'subjective' mind inquiring into the world and 'objective' world yielding up its truth. For now the order of our knowledge and the order of reality coincide: there is, for the metaphysical inquirer, no longer any gap between what is most knowable *to us* and what is most knowable. The world is constituted of essences and, when we are doing metaphysics, so is our thinking: indeed, it is the very same essences that constitute world and mind' (Lear 1988: 249).

⁷ Annas 1993: 137.

⁸ 'Second' nature is McDowell's term, and is not used by Annas.

⁹ The distinction between mere nature and second nature overlaps in many important respects with Ricoeur's distinction between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity. On this distinction in Ricoeur, see chapter 4, section 2.2.

modern science.¹⁰ This seems to be at least a crude approximation of the objection made by Bernard Williams who, despite his own reservations about scientific tendencies in modern (moral) philosophy, argues that Aristotle had a conception of nature no longer available to us, in which it would serve as an Archimedean point for justifying ethics (Williams 1985: 22-53; cf. McDowell 1995: 155, 177n. 46, 47, 48). In response to these objections, McDowell makes the valuable hermeneutic observation that the desire for a grounding or foundation for ethics is a peculiarly *modern* phenomenon, symptomatic of ‘a location in the history of thought that separates us from Aristotle.’¹¹ To understand Aristotle’s naturalism correctly, we need to achieve ‘a willed immunity’ to some of the influence of our intellectual inheritance, an influence of which ‘Aristotle was simply innocent’ (McDowell 1995: 155-6). Instead, we must recognise that Aristotle’s aim in developing his conception of second nature is to safeguard against outside influences that count as interferences with that nature; to distinguish between what forms an expression of a person’s natural development and what forms a corruption of it; between a natural and *unnatural* development (cf. Annas 1993: 137). Hence the argument in book VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that pleasure is just what happens when we achieve unimpeded natural functioning, and that pain is what we experience when our natural functioning is frustrated. This argument is echoed by Spinoza’s assimilation of pleasure with an increase in one’s power, and pain with a decrease in one’s power.

¹⁰ This claim is rightly rejected by McDowell, who builds on his reading of Aristotle to launch a critique of modern empirical realism’s over-dependence on scientific methodology. As McDowell sees it: ‘it is one thing to recognize that the impersonal stance of scientific investigation is a methodological necessity for the achievement of a valuable mode of understanding reality; it is quite another thing to take the dawning grasp of this, in the modern era, for a metaphysical insight into the notion of objectivity as such, so that objective correctness in any mode of thought must be anchored in this kind of access to the real. And it is simply a confusion if one is encouraged in this thought by the idea that what science uncovers is the nearest we can come to the “in itself”. The detranscendentalized analogue of Kant’s picture that empirical realism amounts to is not the educated common sense it represents itself as being; it is shallow metaphysics’ (McDowell 1995: 164).

¹¹ McDowell also claims that Aristotle was not overly concerned about a grounding for ethics, as is strongly suggested by the fact that his ethical lectures are addressed only to people who have been ‘properly brought up’ (McDowell 1995: 156; cf. *NE* 1095b4-6), i.e., people who most likely already held the same normative presuppositions as he would have done.

Ricoeur enables us to bring these two hermeneutic points together. Human nature is part of a larger (metaphysical) nature, and it is also the potentiality to develop (unimpeded). Ricoeur builds on this latter sense of nature as potentiality to explain how human capability, as a metaphysical quality, becomes manifested in particular capacities.¹² Ricoeur is therefore likely to agree with the observation that nature also occupies a stronger role in Aristotle as the end of human development: ‘natural life’ is the life led by humans whose potentialities develop unimpeded by other, external factors (cf. Annas 1993: 137). So for Aristotle, as for Ricoeur, it would seem that natural life simply constitutes the life which would manifest human capability to the greatest possible degree in particular human capacities. For this reason, Aristotle is the point of departure for what Ricoeur calls his ‘little ethics’ in *Oneself as Another*.¹³ Ricoeur’s ‘little ethics’ describes the conditions under which each and every human being would be afforded the maximal opportunity to develop particular capacities unimpeded, by ‘*aiming at the good life, with and for others, in just institutions*’ (OA 172 ff.). Let us now examine this ‘aim’ in Aristotle, and its significance for religion as anthropological life.

2. The Pursuit of the Good Life in Aristotle

2.1 Eudaimonia: The Good Life

Eudaimonia is a notoriously ambiguous term that has no exact parallel in English. In his interpretation of Aristotle, Ricoeur allows this ambiguity to include intrinsic goodness and basic pleasure.¹⁴ Unfortunately, the tendency of many other modern commentators has simply been to opt for the word ‘happiness’ as the nearest English approximation. However,

¹² See OA 302-308. See also Ricoeur 2002: 282-283 ff.; Ricoeur 2004a: 166-167.

¹³ For a full discussion of Ricoeur’s ‘little ethics’, see chapter 4, especially section 5.1.

¹⁴ See, for example, OA 169-202, especially 172-194.

this strategy is dangerously misleading. For it risks confusing *eudaimonia* with our modern understanding of happiness, which we tend to associate with the state of pleasure. This is rarely stable and enduring, but more often than not fleeting, or at least short-lived and subjective.¹⁵ Yet such modern understanding is clearly not what Aristotle intends when he refers to *eudaimonia*. Rather, as he explains in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, *eudaimonia* is supposed to capture the best sort of life for a human being *qua* human being to live, ‘a sort of living well and doing well’ (*NE* 1098b22). In other words, it is not – as we understand it today – the feeling of pleasure that attends our living well and doing well; rather, it is the *activity* of living well and doing well. *Eudaimonia* is ‘an activity of the soul in accordance with complete excellence’ or full virtue (*arête*) (1102a5).¹⁶

Aristotle’s definition clearly distinguishes *eudaimonia* from the contemporary conception of happiness. For to say that *eudaimonia* is an activity is to say that to flourish or attain excellence involves *doing things* in striving for the good life. In fact, Ricoeur seems correct here when he remarks that the ‘first great lesson we receive from Aristotle is to seek the fundamental basis for the aim of the “good life” in praxis’ (*OA* 172).¹⁷ Flourishing is not a static state but an activity or set of activities. Similarly, to say that *eudaimonia* is an activity ‘in accordance with complete excellence’ means that, since to flourish is to do certain things

¹⁵ For a useful comparative evaluation of ancient and modern conceptions of ‘happiness’, see Annas 1993.

¹⁶ There is some contention over the correct translation of *arête*. Christopher Rowe’s translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* – which is used throughout this thesis – opts for the word ‘excellence’, while many standard translations have often used the word ‘virtue’. Although my preference is for the latter, I shall use the two words interchangeably. Quotes from the text referring to ‘excellence’ should thus be read as referring also to ‘virtue’.

¹⁷ However, Ricoeur himself notes a paradox in Aristotle’s account of the pursuit of the good life. This is symptomatic of Aristotle’s attempt to set up ‘the teleology internal to praxis as the structuring principle for the aim of the “good life”’ (*OA* 172-3). On Aristotle’s account, praxis is presented both as an end in itself, and also as a means to some further end. As Ricoeur comments: ‘The paradox would be resolved if one were to find a hierarchical principle that would allow finalities to be included, as it were, one within another, the higher being the excess of the lower. But...the *Nicomachean Ethics* do not seem to offer a coherent analysis of this hierarchy of actions and their corresponding ends’ (*OA* 173). Ricoeur raises a critical issue here that, while beyond the aims of the present thesis, could be part of a further study concerning, for example, the influence of Ricoeur’s Kantian commitments on his critical assessment of Aristotle. For Ricoeur’s discussion of this paradox in Aristotle, and his attempt at a response, see *OA* 172-175 ff.

excellently or well, a person who exercises her faculties but does so inefficiently or badly cannot be said to be living excellently or well.¹⁸ Human beings flourish when they perform well the function, task, or characteristic activity (*ergon*) that human beings are uniquely suited to perform.¹⁹ They flourish when reason guides them consistently in the integrated exercise of all the human virtues (1098a5-20).²⁰

Eudaimonia can thus be described as the activity of living well, and will be understood in this thesis as ‘the good life’, the goal of Aristotelian ethical deliberation. Ethics, for Aristotle, is ultimately concerned with living well. This illustrates again the formative influence of Aristotle upon Ricoeur’s own ethics, which are equally grounded on the teleological aim towards the good life, but also include moral and metaphysical dimensions.²¹

2.2 Orexis: (Rational) Desire

The human pursuit of *eudaimonia* is situated in the broader context of anthropological life when we learn that this pursuit is driven by *orexis*, or a particular form of desire which Aristotle describes as an inner striving.²² This desire accompanies Aristotle’s attempt to situate human agents within the broader context of nature as a whole. Aristotle argues that *all*

¹⁸ This will be addressed in more detail in section 3, below. A useful and concise discussion of this issue can be found in Barnes 2000: 123-130.

¹⁹ ‘Thus Aristotle (him again!) asked whether there is an *ergon* – a function, a task – for man as such, as there is a task for the musician, the doctor, and the architect’ (OA 177).

²⁰ cf. Cates 1997: 5-6 ff. for an explicitly religious (Christian) reading of Aristotle on virtue and friendship.

²¹ cf. Introduction, chapter 1, and chapter 3.

²² Nussbaum observes that, despite the contention over the precise meaning of *orexis*, it seems fairly clear that the ‘word is an item of [Aristotle’s] own creation’, occurring, in pre-Aristotelian Greek, ‘in only one alleged place: in the dubious ethical fragments of Democritus’ (Nussbaum 1986: 273-4). Nussbaum’s careful reading of *orexis* in Aristotle, as well as its related verb *oregō* in Greek literature and philosophy from Homer onwards, isolates certain key features. First, *orexis* strongly implies directedness towards an object. That is, it connotes ‘not a vague state of yearning or being-affected, but a focusing on something, a pointing towards something’ (274). Second, like Spinoza’s *conatus*, it is active more than passive: ‘it is a going for, a reaching after (whether bodily or psychic), as opposed to a being-overwhelmed, or an empty being-in need’ (274).

action – both human and animal action – is caused by *orexis*, or *desire*.²³ Human beings have in common with other animals the fact that they desire, and consequently pursue, items in the world which they then attain and appropriate. As finite creatures, neither humans nor other animals are self-sufficient. Consequently, they naturally pursue items in the world which they perceive themselves as needing, and toward which, argues Aristotle, they inwardly strain (Nussbaum 1986: 276).²⁴

In describing human beings as naturally striving for items in the world, which they perceive themselves as needing, Aristotle places human action in the same framework as general animal motions. *Orexis* is a selective reaching-out; humans, like animals, inwardly strive after objects that are seen to have a certain relation to their needs.

With this line of interpreting Aristotle, it is possible to understand the way in which Ricoeur joins Spinoza's *conatus* to Aristotle's anthropology. The crucial hermeneutic point is that Aristotle places human action and the human being squarely within nature. Like Spinoza, Aristotle does not intend *orexis* as it applies to the human to be understood merely as some brutish, base appetite, directed towards the fulfilment of our most primitive wants. Instead, this inner striving, in its *human* form, should be understood as a form of *rational* desire. Much like the way in which Spinoza's *conatus* denotes the *rational* striving to persist in one's own being,²⁵ *orexis* is the way in which the human, qua rational animal, experiences a distinctive inner striving.²⁶

²³ These claims first appear in *De Anima* III.9, where Aristotle explains animal movement. See Nussbaum 1986: 275; cf. Aristotle 1984.

²⁴ 'Moving is seen to be intrinsically connected with a lack of self-sufficiency, or completeness, and with the inner movement towards the world with which needy creatures are fortunately endowed' (Nussbaum 1986: 276).

²⁵ See chapter 1, section 3.1 ff.

²⁶ For Ricoeur's comments on the parallels between Aristotle's *orexis* and Spinoza's *conatus*, see *AV* 74-75.

Orexis may be what links us to other creatures in the animal kingdom. But it will take a particular form with particular creatures who each pursue their own particular good. For as Aristotle asserts, the goodness of particular lives is, and must be, species relative (1141a29-34). Human *orexis* is thus a rational desire, aimed at, or striving for, the good life for rational beings. It is for this reason that Aristotle's ethics is ultimately rooted in *anthropological* life: for he is ultimately concerned with the nature of the good *human* life.

3. The Good Life in Aristotle

3.1 The Good Life and Human Capacities

Aristotle is thus adamant that a good human life must be one that is both specific and appropriate for the human to live. This point is made in what Nussbaum calls Aristotle's 'human function argument'. Nussbaum draws a useful analogy with crafts to illustrate the argument (Nussbaum 1986: 293), which runs as follows: The understanding of good masonry, say, or good piano-playing, must begin from an understanding of what those functions are. It could not, logically, turn out that the function of a good mason was to play the piano: good functioning for any craft practitioner must remain within the boundaries of what that activity, in its nature, is. So in the same way, it could not, logically, turn out that the best life for a human being was the life characteristic of centipedes; for centipede life contains features that human life does not contain, and it lacks certain features that we regard as essential to properly human life. (cf. Nussbaum 1986: 293). So given that human flourishing has already been established as a matter of performing certain activities excellently, we can also add that the good life for a human is inextricably bound up with human activity. *Eudaimonia* cannot be something that other people give to us; it must be something we can

achieve for ourselves. Just as the piano-player does not become a good piano-player without the activity of playing the piano and acquiring the requisite skills, so too the human being must live in a particular way before we can say that she has acquired a good life.

This reading of Aristotle, which interprets him as locating the human being's final good – the good life – firmly within the individual human being's activity, is of great significance for our understanding of human capacities in Ricoeur.²⁷ For if the individual's final good is a matter of *her own* activity, then she must be fundamentally *capable* of attaining that good *for herself*. Human beings, on this reading, should not be seen as fallen or flawed to the extent that they are incapable of achieving what it is fully within their power, as human beings, to achieve. Nor should human beings be seen as requiring any sort of assistance or intervention from without in order to achieve their final goods. Rather each human's final good is inconceivable apart from that individual human's capacities, and that individual human's activity – it just *is* to act in a particular way.

This point is underscored by Nussbaum's observation that the subject matter of Aristotelian ethics is the *human* good, or the good life for a human being. 'We must speak about the good,' writes the author of the *Magna Moralia*, 'and about what is good not *simpliciter*, but for us.' (*Magna Moralia* 1182b3-5).²⁸ Aristotle conceives ethics not as theoretical but as *practical*. Ethics is concerned, above all, with how to live. It follows from this that there is no point in talking about the good life in an ethical inquiry if this life is not practically attainable by beings with our particular capacities. As Nussbaum puts it, the 'life of a divine being might be ever so admirable; but the study of this life, insofar as it lies beyond our [capacities], is not pertinent to the practical aims of ethics' (Nussbaum 1986: 292-3). If ethics

²⁷ See also Ricoeur's discussion of human activities in Aristotle, including human 'art' or *tekhne*, in *OA* 172-3, n.1.

²⁸ Nussbaum's translation (Nussbaum 1986: 292).

is to be understood as practical, it is to be understood as concerned with *our* lives, with *our* limitations, and the ends that might be attained by beings with *our* capacities; in sum, it is to be understood as concerned with anthropological life.

The present argument is that Aristotle has captured something very important for Ricoeur's architectonic of moral religion with this sense of anthropological life. For Ricoeur, to attest to a fundamental capability is to attest to a fundamental human goodness. As our hermeneutic engagement with Kant will reveal, this fundamental capability implies that the human subject remains forever capable of recovering the original goodness which is obscured, but never completely destroyed, by evil and wrongdoing. So for Ricoeur to speak of human capacities (and incapacities) is to speak of particular manifestations of a fundamental capability that can always be restored, no matter what the damage. It remains to be seen whether or not this vision of regeneration that underlies Ricoeur's hermeneutics of ethical life is too optimistic.²⁹ Nevertheless, Ricoeur gains from this interpretation of Aristotle an anthropological framework which enables him to develop a conception of ethical life that is thoroughly *practical*, insofar as it is grounded on the particular capacities for ethical action that distinguish us as human.

3.2 The Fragility of the Good Life and the Vulnerability of Human Capacities

It is worth pausing at this stage to recall Ricoeur's notion of a fundamental human capability. Human capability is a generic, metaphysical quality of being human which constitutes the crucial foundation of moral religion, grounding the attestation that the human remains

²⁹ Chapter 3 will suggest that Ricoeur's engagement with Kant indicates that his vision of regeneration is not too optimistic. It will be claimed that while Ricoeur shares Kant's hope that we can return to the original 'predisposition to good' from which our 'propensity to evil' has led us, he also accepts the framework established by Kant in the *Religion*, and in particular the latter's suggestion that moral evil, as a problem that emerges in the social condition, will require a social solution – a *community* or commonwealth governed by the kingdom of ends where Enlightenment reason and true *moral* religion (as opposed to revealed religion) will be combined.

forever capable of returning to the good from which she has strayed, and therefore forever capable of forming an ethical commonwealth with those other human beings with and among whom she is inextricably embedded. To be human, asserts Ricoeur, is to be capable. Yet it has already been established that human capability comes hand in hand with a vulnerability to factors beyond the individual human being's control, which emerge as soon as we move from the metaphysical to the anthropological level, where capability becomes manifested in particular individuals in particular contexts either as capacities or incapacities. Ontologically speaking, there is nothing to distinguish the privileged, reasonably articulate, middle-class civil servant from the mute, unemployed paraplegic; they are both *essentially* human, and thus both *essentially* capable. But they can be distinguished in terms of their verbal and physical *capacities*. And we can take it the former's superior capacities (for speech and particular movements, for example) are not attributable to anything within his control. They are natural endowments and, as such, a matter of brute luck. What is manifested at the anthropological level does not necessarily match up to the possibility inherent at the metaphysical level of ontology. Far from it. Yet this example illustrates the vulnerability of each and every human capacity. The civil servant could just as easily have been born without the verbal and physical capacities he takes for granted. Or he might find himself unexpectedly stripped of these capacities in an unforeseen, traumatic incident at some untold stage in the future. To be human, then, is to be fundamentally capable of achieving one's final end(s). But the extent to which one can pursue meaningfully one's final end(s) will be tempered by factors beyond the individual agent's control.

Aristotle is acutely aware of the fragility of the good life. Indeed, it is an inevitable consequence of his view that the good life must be *active*. Recall that *eudaimonia* is not a state, but the *activity* of living well and doing well – 'an activity of the soul in accordance with

complete excellence' or full virtue (1102a5). And activity can of course be impeded in all sorts of ways by factors beyond our control. Accordingly, while the human being qua human being may be fundamentally capable of living a good life, whether she does so or not is never entirely within her power, but will be determined equally by factors beyond her control. As Aristotle explains:

...no activity is complete if it is impeded, and *eudaimonia* is something complete. This is why, in order for a person to be *eudaimon*, he also needs the goods relating to the body, and external goods, and those fortune brings i.e. in order for him not to be impeded in these respects (1153b16-19).

The good life that in Aristotle is the object of human desire is structured by activities that, according to Ricoeur, require particular capacities in order to be undertaken. The possession of these capacities, which are to a large extent beyond the individual's control, renders the individual vulnerable. And that vulnerability is heightened when we recall that the individual is structurally driven – by *orexis* – to desire and thus to continually pursue that good life. Ricoeur is very clear that an individual's good life is contingent on activity and thus those very capacities which are perpetually unstable.³⁰

Aristotle's argument is constructed in direct opposition to those who, seeking to safeguard *eudaimonia* from external fortune, assert that the good life consists simply in having a good ethical state or condition, because this condition is itself stable even under the most dire circumstances. For there seems to be a considerable gulf between what is involved in preserving a particular inner state, and actually living a life. Aristotle illustrates this with the

³⁰ See *AV* 74-77ff.

example of a person with a well-formed character who sleeps all the way through his adult life, doing nothing at all. How, Aristotle asks, can such a person be said to be living a good life? We cannot think that a state or condition that never *does* anything is sufficient for living well. Instead, it seems incomplete, unfulfilled, with little or no bearing on life as it is actually lived (cf. *NE* 1176a34-35).

This particular aspect of Aristotle's anthropology is highly significant for Ricoeur's architectonic of moral religion. For it follows from Aristotle's emphasis on activity that fundamental human capability will amount to nought if it is never *manifested* in particular capacities.³¹ Capacities will never be realised as long as a human being remains inactive. The human will be left instead with unrealised, dormant potentiality – a fundamental capability that never reaches fulfilment. It is the emphasis on activity we gain from Aristotle that renders anthropological life *ethical*. For ethics assumes a central role here, charged with enabling each and every human being to manifest their fundamental capability in actual capacities; with ensuring that each and every human being is afforded the opportunity of activity, of participation in a community with like others; and with ensuring that the inevitable vulnerability to misfortune of particular individuals does not result in a gross dissymmetry in human relations, but that human beings collaborate in their pursuit of the good life without isolating particular vulnerable individuals.³² Through Aristotle's insight, ethics becomes, for Ricoeur, a matter not only of 'aiming at the good life with and for others' but also, crucially, '*in just institutions*.'³³

³¹ This echoes Spinoza's assertion that knowledge, and so power, can only come with activity. For if one is never active, but merely re-active, then they will never achieve knowledge, and so power, and so freedom; instead they will remain the passive recipients of external forces acting upon them.

³² See further chapter 4, section 4.2. See also *OA* 169-296.

³³ Again, we see the three studies of Ricoeur's 'little ethics' reflected here, which are concerned with i) 'aiming at the good life'; ii) 'with and for others'; iii) 'in just institutions', deriving from both Aristotle and Kant, respectively. cf. chapter 4, section 5.1. cf. also *OA* 169-296.

This account of *eudaimonia* as inconceivable apart from human activity in the world also counters a second strategy which attempts to render the good life invulnerable. This strategy distinguishes external, worldly activity from a full ‘internal health’³⁴ that includes thought and awareness. The latter strategy claims that as long as cognitive functioning and ethical awareness are present *in* the virtuous person, then it does not matter at all if she is prevented from carrying out such projects as she would otherwise be disposed to do. She is living well as long as she is able to form virtuous intentions and to think good thoughts.

Aristotle counters this strategy with the assertion that thoughts, intentions, and ideals – general marks of what might be called internal health – all amount to nothing if they cannot be implemented in *activity*. As long as our practices must take place in the world where we will always be vulnerable to external fortune, so the good life must itself be fragile. Furthermore, in support of Aristotle, we might question whether even one’s inner character can be truly thought of as immune from external fortune. For experience suggests that inner character can be affected in all sorts of ways – for better or for worse – by our encounters with events in the external world over which we have no control. A young mother may be profoundly affected by the loss of her infant child, to the extent that her character can be said to have been shaped by the loss in a truly significant way. This will run deeper than externally visible traits, or what we might call external marks of character. Instead the mother’s experiences will have affected her so deeply as to alter significantly her existing attitudes, desires, projects and values.

Human activities, then, whether inner cognitive processes or external interactions with the world, are vulnerable. And insofar as the good life is inconceivable apart from human activity, it is fragile. Yet it is the fragility of the good life that, in part, endows it with

³⁴ I appropriate the term ‘internal health’ from Nussbaum 1986: 325.

value. If the good life was not fragile, if it was immune to chance, then it would lose its value as the end of human activity, as that elusive target which we strive to attain all the while knowing it may either exceed – or be wrenched from – our grasp at any moment.³⁵

Furthermore, inherent in the fragility of *eudaimonia* is a tension between vulnerability, on the one hand, and *possibility*, on the other. As socially-situated creatures, humans live lives that are contingent upon, and interdependent with, other like creatures. This is, of course, a source of enormous vulnerability. My pursuit of my good life is at the mercy of those around me, with whom I interact and upon whom I depend, from my family and close friends to colleagues, doctors and politicians.³⁶ Yet while this interdependence is a source of vulnerability, it also presents us with untold and unlimited possibilities.³⁷

Ricoeur's interest in Aristotle is determined largely by the former's acceptance of vulnerability, but also the great possibilities in interpersonal relationships. For in collaborating with like others, I not only achieve what I never could achieve in isolation.³⁸ As Ricoeur notes, I also discover in this collaboration a source of enormous value unavailable to me as an isolated individual. This source of value is the good of *friendship*, and an integral component of Aristotle's conception of *eudaimonia*. Ricoeur agrees with Aristotle on the great value of friendship, and the next section offers a detailed interpretation of friendship in each of these philosophers.

³⁵ I discuss this and related issues in Carter 2011.

³⁶ cf. *AV*. At the same time, and as chapter 4 will explain, this interdependence also renders those others dependent on *me* (cf. chapter 4, sections 2 and 4).

³⁷ cf. chapter 1, section 5.3.

³⁸ Again, cf. chapter 1, section 5.3.

4. Friendship in Aristotle and Ricoeur

4.1 Friendship, Ethics and the Good Life

We find Aristotle's most detailed exploration of the tension between possibility and vulnerability in his account of friendship. Aristotle defines friendship (*philia*) as a relationship between separate beings consisting in reciprocal and mutually known affection and well-wishing (cf. *OA* 183). Friendship is a relationship which 'demands that one wish a friend good things for his sake' (1155b32).

Aristotle distinguishes three different types of friendship. The first type is friendship based on what advantage two individuals can gain from the relationship: doctor and patient; builder and householder; pub landlord and patron – they share good will because they get something out of the relationship. The second type is friendship based on shared pleasure: a shared pleasure in playing tennis, a shared pleasure in drinking good wine, a shared pleasure (if it can be so described) in watching Queens Park Rangers on a Saturday afternoon – but this friendship only thrives insofar as the thing that gives the pleasure continues to exist between those involved. Aristotle notes that these first two types of friendships tend to be unstable and short lived. They are, he says, 'easily dissolved, if the parties become different; for if they are no longer pleasant or useful, they cease loving each other' (1156a20-21). Furthermore, such friendships tend to be superficial, because they are based on partial, incomplete understandings of the persons involved: 'they do not love by reference to the way the person loved *is*, but to his being useful or pleasant...in fact these friendships are friendships incidentally' (1156a16-18).³⁹

³⁹ Although friendships of the first two types are incomplete in their instability and superficiality, they are still *friendships*. For in each instance the participants do wish one another well for their own sakes. They simply conceive of one another according to a narrow description of who they are relative to one another, such that they are attracted to and wish good for one another *as* individuals who are advantageous to them, or who bring them pleasure. If they cease to be advantageous or pleasing then the affection that led to the friendship in the

The third type of friendship – and the best kind, on Aristotle’s view – is one that arises and persists primarily on the basis of the friends’ character virtue or excellence of character. He says:

...it is the friendship between good people, those resembling each other in excellence, that is complete; for each alike of these wishes good things for the other in so far as he is good, and he is good in himself. And those who wish good things for their friends, for their friends’ sake, are friends most of all; for they do so because of the friends themselves, and not incidentally. So friendship between these lasts so long as they are good, and excellence is something lasting. Again, each party is good without qualification, and is good for his friend; for the good are both good without qualification and of benefit to one another. (1156b7-14).⁴⁰

This third type of friendship – let us call it character-friendship – is thus stable and lasting.⁴¹ It is also more intimate than the first two types, for it is based on a more complete knowledge of the persons involved. Character-friends are attracted to one another *as* virtuous, which is to say that a character-friend is compelled by her friend’s conception of the good, including her desires and plans for realising that good, her habits of perception, her likes and dislikes, her cares and concerns, and so on (cf. Cates 1997: 51). These are the

first place and motivated its continuation will dissolve. So will the occasion for mutual well-wishing (cf. Cates 1997: 50-51).

⁴⁰ The terms used by Aristotle in describing the third type of friendship, including ‘good without qualification’, have a remarkable affinity with Kant. Could it be that Ricoeur is drawn to the third type of friendship in Aristotle for that very reason, to the extent that even his appropriation of Aristotle appears Kantian? This is a significant critical issue that must be addressed in reading Ricoeur, and which will be discussed in the following two chapters. On the relationship between Aristotle and Kant in Ricoeur, and Ricoeur’s attempt to bring the two together, see Ricoeur 1987 (cf. also Ricoeur 2005).

⁴¹ Although while it may be more reliable than the first two types of friendship, the third type of friendship is of course still fragile, since it renders each participant dependent on factors beyond their immediate control (in this case, the other individual who participates in the friendship). This will be discussed in section 4.2, below.

particulars that, in the deepest sense, make the friend who she is, and to love them is to love the friend *as she is in herself*.⁴² Furthermore, character friendship is rooted in a mutuality and reciprocity that results from the shared activity of living together. As Aristotle explains, ‘such friendship also requires time for the parties to grow acquainted with each other’s character; for as the proverb has it, people cannot have get to know each other before they have savoured all that salt together’ (1156b26-29).⁴³ Prolonged shared activity ensures that character friends really love one another as they are in themselves, in their full particularity.⁴⁴

It is with this particular vision of character friendship in mind – outlined in books VIII and IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics* – that Aristotle classifies friendship as an *external* good⁴⁵ which is as integral to *eudaimonia* as virtue. His argument runs as follows: virtue as a good is alone insufficient for *eudaimonia*, which will require certain external goods; for *eudaimonia*, conceived as doing well and living well (1098b21), requires not merely virtues, but *activities* which manifest these virtues. And for these activities to be realised, the proper resources and

⁴² This last point is important, for although character friendship’s stability is partly rooted in the *shared* virtues of the participants, Aristotle is clear that these friends remain distinct individuals with distinct character traits. Character friendship is based on a deep and more complete knowledge of the persons involved, where the participants seek to emulate and learn from the strengths and wisdom of one another. And while the participants in a genuine character friendship will presumably be practically wise agents possessed of all the virtues, as Aristotle’s thesis of the unity of virtues (1144b30ff.) implies, the pattern of unified virtues will take a different shape in different virtuous individuals. (1156b33-1159a13). As Sherman explains: ‘In one individual, a sense of generosity may be pre-eminent, in another, the courage of battle. It is not that certain characteristics are absent in the other or that an individual ignores the requirements of the full set of virtues. It is, rather, that different circumstances lead to different actualizations. Goodness has a different landscape in different, equally good persons’ (Sherman 1997: 207).

⁴³ Sherman makes the valuable observation that a life of shared activity equally implies a shared emotional life. Consequently, friends feel pleasure and pain at the same sorts of things (*NE* 1166a7-8; a27); ‘with character friendship, this is not simply a matter of shared taste, but a matter of shared moral sentiments (pity, fear, hope, anger, and, in general, pleasures and pains in that sense) that are appropriate to circumstances’ (Sherman 1997: 205).

⁴⁴ Once again, Sherman argues that this aspect of character friendship acts as a useful counter against the danger of *idealisation* in friendship: ‘Living together, spending time together, coming to know the intimate details of another’s ways – are forceful counters against the tendency to idealise certain abstract qualities or, again, a whole person in his or her full particularity.’ (Sherman 1997: 207; cf. Sherman 1994).

⁴⁵ Aristotle follows the convention of his day by classifying goods into three categories, ‘with some said to be external, and others said to relate to soul and body respectively’ (1098b12-14). However, he departs from what would have been conventional wisdom – which is broadly based on the prevailing Platonic view of the day, ‘which is an old one, and has the agreement of those who reflect philosophically’ – in assigning to external goods as equal an importance as the internal goods of the soul.

opportunities must be at hand. And among these resources or external goods are friends. He explains:

Nevertheless [*eudaimonia*] clearly also requires external goods in addition, as we have said; for it is impossible, or not easy, to perform fine actions if one is without resources. For in the first place many things are done by means of friends, or wealth, or political power, as if by means of tools; and then again, there are some things the lack of which is like a stain on *eudaimonia*, things like good birth, being blessed in one's children, beauty: for the person who is extremely ugly, or of low birth, or on his own without children is someone we would not be altogether inclined to call *eudaimon*, and even less inclined, presumably, if someone had totally depraved children or friends, or ones who were good but dead. (1099a31-b6; cf. Sherman 1989: 125).

On the basis of this argument, Aristotle goes on to assert that friends are ultimately indispensable to *eudaimonia*. As Ricoeur observes, Aristotle's *eudaimon* quite literally 'needs friends' – for she could not be *eudaimon* without them (1169b22; cf. *OA* 182 ff.). Aristotle makes two arguments in support of this claim. First, he asserts that *philia* is *instrumental* to attaining *eudaimonia*: the presence of friends enables particular activities that are constitutive of the good life lived. Second, and more controversially, he makes the stronger assertion that *philia* is in fact an *intrinsic* component of *eudaimonia*: friends not only enable *eudaimonia*, they are woven into its very fabric. How does Aristotle arrive at these assertions?

Philia's instrumental contribution to *eudaimonia* is evident in two respects. First, friendship assists *self*-knowledge: we can discern and evaluate the characters of others better than our own (1169b34), and in character-friendship, we appreciate that our friend's character is sufficiently like our own for friendship to give us the opportunity for self-

discovery. Second, as mentioned above, sharing activities with friends enables us to carry on these activities in a more continuous, pleasant and effective way than we could manage if we were limited to individual efforts. Friendship is thus a positive example, in Ricoeur's post-Hegelian Kantian terms, of the possibilities that stem from our lived experience of interdependence with like others.⁴⁶

The good, flourishing human life is made up of activities, and a context of shared and joint activities enables people to achieve a level of activity which would otherwise be beyond their reach (1155a15-20; cf. Annas 1993: 251-2). For Aristotle, as with Spinoza, we achieve in collaboration what we could never achieve in isolation, a point underscored by Nussbaum's analysis of the intense motivational role of *philia* in ethical deliberation. Nussbaum cites Aristotle's criticism of Plato's ideal of the Republic as a city state that does away with the nuclear family. Aristotle's criticism is founded on the idea that the intensity of the concern that binds parents and children (for example) in the enterprise of moral education cannot simply be replaced by a communal system (although it must work *within* one). As she explains:

...it is the thought that it is *your own* child, not someone else's, together with the thought that you are unique and irreplaceable for that child and that child for you, that most keenly spurs the parent to work and care for the education of the child, the child to work and care for the parent...Take intimacy and felt love away and you have, Aristotle concludes, only a 'watery' sort of concern all round without the power to mould or transform a soul (Nussbaum 1986: 362; cf. 1169b11-15).⁴⁷

⁴⁶ cf. Chapter 1, section 5.3; chapter 4, sections 2.3, 2.4, 4.1, 4.2, 5.1 and 6.2.

⁴⁷ Nussbaum's example resonates strongly with Ricoeur's 'Interlude' on tragic action in *Oneself as Another*, written in memory of his son Olivier, who committed suicide shortly after Ricoeur had delivered the Gifford Lectures in 1986. See Ricoeur 1998: 91-92.

This leads to Aristotle's more radical claim that *philia* is not merely instrumental, but in fact an *intrinsic* component of *eudaimonia*. For, as Nussbaum's comments make clear, there is something in particular relations of intimacy that go far beyond the merely instrumental. We *do* in fact love the ones we love *for their own sake*, not just for the sake of some further benefit to ourselves. ('It would not be *philia*,' notes Nussbaum, 'but something else, if it *were* altogether instrumental' [365]). Friendship, for Aristotle, is not simply 'very necessary for living' (1154a4), but also beautiful and valuable in its own right – intrinsically:

Not only is it necessary, it is also a fine thing. For we praise those who cherish their friends, and having many friends is thought to be one of the things that are fine. And furthermore, it is held that it is the same men that are good and are friends (1155a29-32).

More strongly, Aristotle is asserting that friendship comes to shape the good life in such a way that *eudaimonia* comes to include the *eudaimonia* of significant others. The kernel of this lies in Aristotle's remarks in I.7 regarding the self-sufficiency of *eudaimonia*. Self-sufficiency is a criterion of *eudaimonia* entailing that a life is 'lacking in nothing', there being no other good which when added to it would make that life more desirable (1097b15-22). But since friends are among the goods which make a life self-sufficient, self-sufficiency is *relational*, and the good life a life dependent upon and interwoven with others (Sherman 1989: 128). In Aristotle's own words: 'By "self-sufficient", we do not mean sufficient for oneself alone, for the person living a life of isolation, but also for one's parents, children, wife, and generally those one loves, and one's fellow citizens, since man is by nature a civic being' (1097b9-11).

Aristotle's position is lent further clarity when considered in light of its historical context. Aristotle is arguing against the major alternative conception of the self-sufficient good at his time of writing: the ideal of an ascetic life as found most famously in Plato's writings. Aristotle is also tempted by this conception, as his famous comments in X.7-8 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* indicate, where he apparently argues that a life cannot be perfectly *eudaimon* if it fully ignores a more divine, contemplative ideal.⁴⁸ But Aristotle's claim is *not* that *eudaimonia* is to be identified with the ascetic life. Rather, he is claiming more modestly that *eudaimonia* must *include* the leisure of contemplation. Excellence in contemplation does not take precedence over the more worldly virtues. It must be cojoined with them in a life which remains essentially political and communal (Sherman 1989: 128-9).

In sum, Aristotle is arguing that friendship is an intrinsic good precisely because the very idea of *eudaimonia* without friends is incoherent. The solitary life goes against our nature as social and political animals. And insofar as humans are social and political animals, the very idea of a human life with no social aspect can only be interpreted as lacking in something so fundamental that we can hardly call it a human life at all. For if *eudaimonia* is to include every value without which a life would be judged incomplete, it must include friendship as an end in its own right. The mutual interactions of character-friendship structure *eudaimonia* in a way

⁴⁸These comments are best captured by Aristotle's opening remarks, which run as follows: 'But if *eudaimonia* is activity in accordance with excellence, it is reasonable that it should be activity in accordance with the *highest kind*, and this will be the excellence of *what is best*. Whether, then, this is intelligence or something else, this element that is thought naturally to rule and guide, and to possess awareness of fine things and divine ones – whether being, itself too, something divine, or the divinest of the things in us, it is the activity of this, in accordance with its own proper excellence, that will be complete *eudaimonia*. That it is *reflective* activity has been said; and this would seem to be in agreement both with what was said before and with the truth. For *this is the highest kind of activity*, since intelligence too is the highest of the things in us, and the objects of intelligence are the highest knowables' (1177a12-22. Emphasis added). Needless to say, these words mark such a break with the argument that dominates the rest of the *Ethics* that it has been suggested by many that they must be the additions of a later editor, if not Aristotle's expressed recognition of a tension in his own thought. On debates surrounding this problematic passage, see Nussbaum 1986: 373-377.

that defines *eudaimonia* as something shared. It is for this reason that Aristotle defines friendship as ‘the greatest’ of external goods (1169b10; cf. Sherman 1997: 209-210).

Friendship thus holds a central and indispensable role in Aristotle’s anthropology, which in turn is highly significant for Ricoeur. The individual is constitutionally driven – by *orexis* – to actively pursue the good life. And the pursuit of the good life is inconceivable apart from the particular others with and among whom it is undertaken, and who are themselves formative aspects of the good. Those particular others are friends. Yet the interdependence which yields friendship as an instrumental and intrinsic good comes at a price. For it renders the individual’s attainment of *eudaimonia* contingent on her character-friends which, as Ricoeur would say, leaves her vulnerable. With Ricoeur, our critical focus must be on friendship as a source of enormous *vulnerability*, as well as possibility. In the individual human being’s pursuit of her own *eudaimonia*, friendship is an indispensable good. In this light friendship exposes, in an especially acute way, the fragility of the good life.

4.2 Friendship and the Vulnerable Human in Aristotle and Ricoeur

Ricoeur gains from Aristotle’s account of friendship both the possibility and vulnerability inherent in our status as socially-situated, interdependent creatures. As with his reading of Spinoza, Ricoeur’s interpretation of Aristotle cuts to the core of the fragility of the good human life (*OA* 178). However, while ethological readings of Spinoza in particular bring to light the contingency of each and every human being on their context, and the manner in which fundamental capability becomes manifested in the particular capacities (or incapacities) with which we are endowed from birth (what might be called *natural* sources of vulnerability), Aristotle’s anthropology demonstrates the extent to which each and every capacity (or

incapacity) with which we are endowed is contingent upon, and thus vulnerable to, those around us (what might be called *historical* sources of vulnerability).⁴⁹

Aristotle's account of friendship is especially helpful in illustrating how human capacities are vulnerable to friends as historical sources of suffering. For, as chapter 4 will examine in detail, friends hold a crucial mediating role between an individual's capacities and her realisation of those capacities – hence Aristotle's assertion that the *eudaimon* 'needs friends' (1169b22).⁵⁰ My realisation of my own capacities is dependent on my friend's expressed recognition – or, in Ricoeur's words, 'approbation' – of those capacities. Yet at the same time, my friend depends on *my* approbation in order to realise her own capacities. So while my capacity to act depends on my having confidence in my power to act, that confidence in turn is dependent on the expressed confidence of my friends in my power to act (and vice versa). This three-fold relation between capacities, confidence and approbation⁵¹ is expressed by Ricoeur as follows:

Power, I will say, affirms itself, declares itself. This connection between affirmation and power needs to be emphasized. It governs all the reflexive forms by which a subject can designate him- or herself as the one who can. But this simple, direct affirmation of a power to act already presents a noteworthy epistemological feature that cannot be proven, demonstrated, but can only be *attested*. This is indicative of a kind of belief that unlike the Platonic *doxa* is not some inferior form of *episteme*....this is...a practical conviction, a

⁴⁹ I appropriate the distinction between the natural and the historical from Hannah Arendt's analysis of action in *The Human Condition* (Arendt 1958: 175-247). Ricoeur also adopts the distinction (in *AV*), a move which is as indicative of the formative influence of Aristotle upon his hermeneutics of ethical life as that of Arendt.

⁵⁰ Chapter 4, section 2.4.

⁵¹ This three-fold relation between capacities, confidence and approbation is examined in detail in chapter 4, sections 2.4 and 4.2.

confidence in one's own capacity, which can be confirmed only through being exercised and through the *approbation others grant to it*. (Ricoeur 2007a: 75. Emphasis added)

Aristotle's account of friendship reveals a vulnerability that is perhaps his most notable contribution to Ricoeur's hermeneutics of ethical life. Vulnerability modifies Ricoeur's post-Kantian conception of autonomy significantly with the recognition that the autonomous agent is always-already vulnerable to those with and among whom she interacts. Ricoeur notes that not only is the capacity to undertake autonomous action dependent to a large extent on the affirmation of this action by others; at an even more fundamental level, the very confidence that renders me capable of undertaking that autonomous action is vulnerable in all sorts of ways to the (mis)recognition and affirmation of those around me (for how can I said to have accomplished an action if it is not recognised as an action by those who witness it?).

In *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur elucidates an inextricable link between 'solicitude' and 'self-esteem': 'Solicitude is not something added onto self-esteem from outside...it unfolds the *dialogical* dimension of self-esteem...such that self-esteem and solicitude cannot be experienced or reflected upon one without the other' (*OA* 180. Emphasis added). In turn, self-esteem is linked to the realisation of one's capacities: 'the self is declared to be worthy of esteem...fundamentally by reason of its *capacities*' (181. Emphasis added). Given this inextricable link between solicitude and self-esteem, Ricoeur concludes that it is necessary to recognize 'the *mediating* role of others between capacities and realisation'. This mediating role is 'celebrated by Aristotle in his treatise on friendship (*philia* in *Nicomachean Ethics* 8-9)' (181.

Emphasis added). For Ricoeur, then, Aristotle's assertion that the *eudaimon* needs friends is taken quite literally to the heart of his conception of the vulnerable human.⁵²

In conclusion, anthropological life in Aristotle holds a pivotal place in Ricoeur's architectonic of moral religion. Through Aristotle, Ricoeur recognises the manifold ways in which the metaphysical quality of capability is manifested as human capacities or incapacities. With Aristotle, Ricoeur also recognises the manifold ways in which particular capacities remain forever vulnerable to factors far beyond the individual's control. If the religious aspect of moral religion concerns both what binds us together as capable human subjects, and what accompanies our recognition of our shared place in the wider whole we call Life (i.e. reverence and joy), then the moral aspect of moral religion will insist on the importance of ethics in attending to the constitutive and circumstantial fragility of human life. Ethics aims at the good life with and for others precisely because to live with others is to be responsible. No single action will be without relation to other people. The good life (*eudaimonia*) must be pursued in just institutions. Such institutions seek to protect individual pursuits of the good life against violence and, ultimately, gross dissymmetry in self-other relations.

The next chapter will assess Ricoeur's return to Kant. After both Spinoza's metaphysics and Aristotle's anthropology, Kant's morality constitutes the third and final level in Ricoeur's architectonic of moral religion. Ricoeur's hermeneutics of ethical life finds in Kant the regulative boundary which aims to ensure both a good life and a responsibility for others.

⁵² For a detailed discussion of this point, see chapter 4, section 2.4.

CHAPTER THREE

RELIGION AS MORAL LIFE IN KANT

‘Here I repeat my debt to Kant’s *Religion within the Limits of Reason*...As radical as evil may be, it will never be more originary than goodness, which is the *Ursprung* in the field of ethics, the orientation to the good as being rooted in the ontological structure of the human being.’

(Ricoeur, ‘Ethics and Human Capability’, 184).

‘...religion, according to Kant, [possesses] no theme other than the *regeneration* of freedom, that is, restoring to freedom the control over it of the good principle.’

(Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 216).

‘...does it not follow from evil and from the inscrutable constitution of (free) will that there is, consequently, a *necessity* for ethics to assume the features of morality? Because there is evil, the aim of the “good life” has to be submitted to the test of moral obligation, which might be described in the following terms: “Act solely in accordance with the maxim by which you can wish at the same time that what *ought not to be*, namely evil, will indeed *not exist*.”’

(Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 218).

Kant's morality in general performs a regulative function in Ricoeur's architectonic of moral religion. Kant's deontology ensures that the individual's pursuit of the good in life is undertaken with and for others in just institutions. How exactly Ricoeur appropriates Kant's test of moral obligation to regulate the ethical aim he derives from Aristotle's anthropology will emerge below. This chapter is concerned with those aspects of Kant's moral thought which enrich the structure already established by Ricoeur's reading of Spinoza and Aristotle. Kant not only contributes a normative framework,¹ but also a moral psychology to Ricoeur's architectonic of moral religion.

In terms of moral psychology, it might be argued that Kant takes core concepts from Aristotle's anthropology, only to give them a decidedly negative emphasis. For example, Kant takes up the Aristotelian rational political animal for his conception of human being, only to locate humanity's corruption in the *polis*: for it is in society, in interaction with like others, that the fundamentally innocent human being is corrupted.² However, the *rational* nature of this humanity is for Kant, as for both Aristotle and, in particular, Spinoza, wholly positive: rationality is at the heart of moral religion.³ Indeed, Kant's wariness of revealed religion, and his enduring ambition to free human beings from its institutions through the power of independent thought, is echoed in his attack on ecclesiastical institutions in *Religion within the Boundaries for Mere Reason*.⁴

To begin the discussion of Kant's morality, this chapter turns to his Categorical Imperative as a response to radical evil. It will be argued that the primary regulative function

¹ Arguably, both Aristotle and Spinoza lack the strong norm that Ricoeur gains from Kant.

² As this chapter will argue, the difference between Kant and Aristotle here reflects the legacy of Christian thought upon Kant, with its emphasis on human corruptibility and, in particular, the Augustinian doctrine of original sin. Aristotle is, of course, unburdened by this legacy.

³ See James 2011.

⁴ This text will henceforth be referred to as the *Religion*. This particular aspect of Kant's thought bears striking parallels to Spinoza's own critique of organised religion, explicitly stated in the *Ethics* (see in particular IApp and related passages discussed in chapter 1 of this thesis).

of the Categorical Imperative is to safeguard against the human propensity for ‘radical evil’. This is despite evil’s origins in human willing which renders the human corrupt. Instead, for Kant, as Ricoeur stresses, the human’s original ‘predisposition to good’ is always more fundamental, more basic, than any propensity to evil (*R* 6:26ff.; *FM*; Ricoeur 1995a; 2002; *MHF*). For Ricoeur’s Kantianism, the human always remains capable of overcoming evil, no matter how deep-seated the corruption. It is because the human being is originally good or, in Ricoeur’s terms, fundamentally capable of overcoming evil, that the Categorical Imperative emerges as a response to evil since, for both Kant and Ricoeur, ‘ought’ always implies ‘can’. The close parallels between Kant’s conception of the original predisposition to good and Ricoeur’s conception of fundamental capability will be discussed, prior to Kant’s conception of virtue.

Kantian virtue will point to a critical convergence between Kant and Aristotle, particularly concerning the cultivation of moral character. Kant claims that evil is something that ought to be – and therefore can be – overcome, and that the cultivation of virtue (as strength in overcoming our heteronomous inclinations) represents our best hope of doing so. It will be argued that while Kant views the origins of evil in the human will as ultimately ‘inscrutable’ to reason, he nevertheless maintains that the human’s fundamental goodness means that such evil could only arise in the social condition, and that society thus constitutes a corrupting influence on the originally innocent human.

The influence of Rousseau’s writings on Kant are especially significant here, and serve also to explain how Kant’s account of human evil in society represents a conscious break from the Christian tradition, especially from the Augustinian doctrine of original sin.⁵

⁵ For Ricoeur’s critical (Kantian) reading of the Augustinian doctrine of original sin, see Ricoeur 1960. A Rousseauian influence can also be detected in Ricoeur’s dismissal of the ‘myth’ of original sin in *Fallible Man*: ‘However primordial badness may be, goodness is yet more primordial. That is why, as we shall see, a myth of

Crucially, this Rousseauian influence shapes Kant's own vision of moral religion as a distinctly democratic, shared moral perspective, which is social, universal, and bound up with autonomy and rationality. Kant's moral religion stems from the rationally responsible attempt to recover a fundamental human goodness overshadowed – but never destroyed – by the corrupting influence of society. The critical question is to what extent Ricoeur appropriates Kant in his own moral religion. At the very least, Kant's account of the human predisposition to good supports Ricoeur's claim to an original goodness or fundamental capability. In other words, the religious is the heart – '*le destinataire du religieux*'⁶ – of Ricoeur's appropriation of Kant on moral life.

1. The Categorical Imperative

The Categorical Imperative represents Kant's most famous – and misunderstood – means of evaluating maxims as the underlying principles of our (moral) actions.⁷ The Categorical Imperative denotes an absolute, unconditional requirement possessing authority in all circumstances. It is required and justified as an end-in-itself, and most notably expressed in a first formulation as follows: 'Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same

fall is possible only within the context of a myth of creation and innocence. If that had been understood, one would not have wondered whether 'the image of God' may be lost, as if man stopped being man by becoming bad. Nor would Rousseau have been accused of inconsistency when he obstinately professed man's natural goodness *and* his historical and cultural perversity' (*FM*, 145).

⁶ cf. Ricoeur 2000a. Ricoeur writes: '*la problématique religieuse peut se résumer dans la capacité extraordinaire de rendre l'homme ordinaire capable de faire le bien. C'est en ce sens que l'homme capable est, comme il a été annoncé, le destinataire religieux et le porteur de la croyance religieuse.*' 'the religious problematic can reemerge in the extraordinary capacity to render the ordinary human capable of doing the good. It is in this sense that the capable human is, as already stated, the addressee of the religious and the holder of religious belief.' (Ricoeur 2000a: 211). '*Destinataire*' is an ambiguous term, which may be rendered into English as 'heart', 'seat', 'location', or 'addressee'. Although I have opted for the term 'heart' on this particular occasion, the term's ambiguity should still be noted. It is quite likely that Ricoeur's use of such an ambiguous term is deliberate. For an alternative translation of this passage, see Treanor & Venema (eds.) 2010: 27-40.

⁷ O'Neill (1989) contains an excellent discussion of the role of maxims in Kant's moral philosophy. See also Wood 1999: 348-349n9.

time will that it should become a universal law' (G 4:421). The regulative function of the Categorical Imperative in this formulation should be made clear, following Ricoeur: it demands both that, in pursuing a vision of the good, we never make exceptions of ourselves, and that we subject our maxims to the same rigorous moral standards we expect – and demand – of all others. In other words, as chapter 4 will make clear, the Categorical Imperative is regulative insofar as it guides or regulates action, and this depends on the moral agent being explicitly *reflexive*. For as reflexive, the moral agent is constantly turning back upon herself in evaluating and subjecting her own actions to the demands of the moral law which she generates and imposes herself.

For the universal core of moral religion, i.e. its rationality, the second formulation of the Categorical Imperative is more significant in its focus on the rational nature of humanity. The formulation states: 'Now I say, a human being, and in general every rational being, *does* exist as an end in himself, *not merely as a means* to be used by this or that will as it pleases' (G II.32). As a means of regulating social conduct, the Imperative's second formulation is as clear as the first: in pursuing your vision of the good with and for others, treat each and every other as an end in herself; ensure that your pursuit of the good never comes at the expense of the other, that she is never merely instrumental to your pursuit, but rather that you respect her in her full humanity as an end-in-herself.⁸

The Categorical Imperative's function as a regulative demand is clear. But what are Kant's grounds for developing it thus? This is where Kant is probably most misunderstood, and it constitutes the primary source of the countless charges of excessive rigorism that have been levelled at his moral philosophy. Indeed, it is on the basis of the Categorical Imperative that most mistaken assumptions about Kant are drawn: namely, that he is obsessed with duty

⁸ cf. *OA* 220-221.

and principle, to the complete exclusion of emotion, virtue, and character formation.⁹ In the words of Richard Rorty's allegation, the general assumption here is that Kant aims to 'derive solutions to moral dilemmas from the analysis of moral concepts' (Rorty 1998: 49).¹⁰

Yet a closer look at the structure of Kant's moral philosophy reveals that the Categorical Imperative arises not merely as the rigorous imposition of abstract, a priori principles upon the messier reality of lived human experience, but is in fact developed as a response to what Kant sees as the very nature of that experience. We are, according to Kant, rational and animal creatures: to the extent that we are the former, we are capable of autonomy; to the extent that we are the latter, we are also prone to heteronomy. We consequently find ourselves constantly torn between the mixed motives emanating from our rational and animal natures, and moral philosophy must respond to the mixed nature of moral experience. This requires a mixed moral philosophy, including *both* a metaphysics of morality, which develops from first principles, and a moral anthropology, attuned to the realities of lived moral experience. So Kant in fact places great emphasis on the importance of moral anthropology: an understanding of what limits and threatens rational, moral agency, and what human powers support it and are essential for the articulation of our moral duties (*DV* 6: 216-7; cf. Loudon 2000).

⁹ In part, the narrow focus of these assumptions can be attributed to an overreliance on the *Groundwork*, an incomplete and inconsistent work initially sketched by Kant, at the early stages of his explorations of ethics, as a textbook for a wide readership (on this front, judging by its initial sales, it was a catastrophic failure!). Read in light of later texts such as the *Religion* and the *Metaphysics of Moral* (the *Doctrine of Virtue*, in particular), the *Groundwork*, with its strict focus on human agency in relation to normative principles, appears precisely as its title suggests, a mere *groundwork*, a preliminary exploration of what was to become Kant's broader interest in a metaphysics of morals or, as this thesis argues, a moral religion. See *DV*.

¹⁰ An accompanying charge is Kant's alleged inability to take account of differences between persons and cases. This is a point made especially forcefully by Bernard Williams (see Williams 1981: 1-19). For a Kantian response to Williams, see Herman 1993: 23-44. Nussbaum (1999) offers a useful survey of the growing sea-change in contemporary Kant literature, and its increasing emphasis on texts such as the *Religion* and the *Metaphysics of Morals*, both of which contain much to counter many of the above allegations.

Consequently, it is a mistake to dismiss the Categorical Imperative as merely an abstract, formalist product of a rationalist metaphysics with no grounding in the realities of lived human experience. For the Categorical Imperative is fundamentally an anthropological construct.¹¹ As Sherman explains, '[i]t addresses the problem of the moral law for a finitely rational agent who can be aware of that moral law and yet oppose it because of inclination. This is the standing occasion for an imperative' (Sherman 1997: 130; cf. *C2* 5: 32-33). As we shall discover with Kantian virtue, the Categorical Imperative is situated in a field of rational players who are not holy – it constrains us where we might otherwise be tempted astray. But, adds Sherman, what is specifically anthropological about the Categorical Imperative is not simply that it is formally designed for beings who might will contrary to the moral law. Substantively, too, 'it generates norms by reference to our finite brand of rational willing and the specific conditions of finitude and vulnerability that characterise our lives' (Sherman 1997: 130). The very notion of the Categorical Imperative, in the present interpretation, depends upon material (i.e. social and economic) assumptions¹² that pertain to us as embodied and embedded beings. Ricoeur, perhaps unwittingly, supports this claim. As he puts it, autonomous moral agents are constantly confronted by 'passive features not comparable beyond the human sphere and, let me quickly add, not comparable beyond the social and political sphere' (*AV* 73).

The question remains whether Ricoeur, in *Oneself as Another*, is sufficiently sensitive to these passive features of autonomy in Kant. Ricoeur criticises what he sees as the excessive formalism in Kant (*OA* 263-269).¹³ He claims to reconfigure the Kantian

¹¹ This reading of Kant owes much to the analysis of Sherman (1997: 130).

¹² These material assumptions will become more clear in the discussion of Kant's Rousseauian account of the social origins of moral evil (section 4.3 of this chapter), as well as in later discussions of Ricoeur's conception of reflexive autonomy (chapter 4).

¹³ This is discussed further in chapter 4, sections 3 and 4.

autonomous moral agent as embedded and reflexive, in order to account for the various aporia encountered by the Categorical Imperative at the ‘places’ of the self’s receptiveness, passivity, and powerlessness (*OA* 212-17). However, as the present interpretation of the Categorical Imperative makes clear, Kant does in fact concede that the moral agent is conditioned by her own passivity, and so vulnerability, which will inevitably result in the confrontation of aporia. It is for this reason that he introduces the Categorical Imperative in the first place. Could it be that Ricoeur, in his attempt to reconfigure Kant, is in fact ‘far more Kantian than he seems to think’?¹⁴

In sum, for the present interpretation of Kant, the Categorical Imperative arises as a guide through, as much as a response to, the lived experience of pursuing the good with and among others. For despite our capacity to discern that which we ought to do, an inscrutable propensity for evil nevertheless lurks within human willing that necessitates the insertion of normative demands into ethical life, lending the Categorical Imperative its urgency.

2. Radical Evil

2.1 The Human Will¹⁵

As Kant presents it in the *Religion*, the human will includes *both* legislative reason (*Wille*) and the faculty of desire (*Willkür*). *Wille* is the purely rational structure which introduces the moral law into the expression of human willing. *Willkür*, on the other hand, is the power of choosing between alternatives; it is determined by an incentive only to the extent that the individual has incorporated that incentive into her maxim. Accordingly no impulse or desire

¹⁴ Anderson 2002: 21. Anderson also notes that Ricoeur’s own exegesis and critique of Kant ‘do *not* detract from his implicit Kantian framework’ which, she argues, can be traced all the way through the ‘little ethics’.

¹⁵ For more on willing and evil in Ricoeur’s philosophy (and Ricoeur’s relation to Kant on this subject), see Anderson 1993.

can be a determining incentive for *Willkür* until *Willkür* chooses to make it so.¹⁶ For unless this power to choose its determining incentives is attributed to *Willkür*, it cannot be both free and yet under the *influence* of desires and incentives. Sensible incentives are thus compatible with absolute freedom in *Willkür*, a fact confirmed by the experience of obligation from which our awareness of *Willkür* arises (Silber 1960: xcv). As Kant explains, the moral law ‘makes us conscious of the independence of our power of choice from determination by all other incentives (of our freedom) and thereby also of the accountability of our actions’ (R 6:26n).

Unlike *Willkür*, however, *Wille* does not choose between alternatives. It is rather the source of an ever-present incentive in *Willkür* which imposes its own normative rational nature. And it is the presence of *Wille*, in relation to *Willkür*, which constitutes what Kant refers to as the predisposition of the will to ‘*personality*’. This predisposition is the ‘susceptibility to respect for the moral law *as of itself a sufficient incentive to the power of choice*.’ This is significant, for it entails a *capacity* to incorporate respect for the moral law into one’s maxim – a capacity which indicates an original or fundamental goodness, or, in Kant’s terms, ‘original predisposition to good’. The mere possibility of respect as *the* moral feeling indicates that ‘there must be present in our nature a predisposition onto which nothing evil can be grafted’ (R 6:27, 6:26; 6: 27-28). This, as we shall discover, is the crucial presupposition on which Kant’s moral religion is grounded.

¹⁶ This thus represents to a certain degree a solution to Kant’s Third Antinomy of pure reason, namely, the compatibility of the noumenal order (of absolute freedom) and phenomenal order (of necessity) in human action.

2.2 The Propensity to Evil

Despite this original predisposition to goodness, however, an inscrutable ‘propensity to evil’ emerges as a fundamental aspect of lived experience. Despite some ‘Kantian’ interpretations to the contrary,¹⁷ Kant is adamant that while its origins remain unknown, this propensity cannot and must not reside in our sensible nature. As he sees it, *moral* evil can only arise in the *moral realm*, the real of *free choice* – the human will. But sensible nature – itself bound up with causality – does not belong to the domain of free choice, or the moral realm. Our sensible inclinations, therefore, cannot be morally evil (or good, for that matter). They are morally neutral. Rather, this propensity to evil is somehow, though ultimately inscrutable, ‘rooted in’ and ‘interwoven with’ our ‘subjective highest basis’ of the adoption of ‘all maxims’ – our power of choice (R 6:32). What can be said is that evil lies in the wilful *subordination* of moral maxims to sensible maxims. It is a voluntary adherence to one’s desires. Despite one’s moral feeling, the agent chooses against the good. Evil is therefore ‘radical’ insofar as it disrupts the very root of the human being’s original predisposition to goodness. Furthermore, because this propensity to evil belongs to both our rational and sensible nature, it follows that we both choose freely and are responsible for the evil we do. Since all good or evil acts must lie in a maxim made by the will (R 6:21), the radical evil in human nature consists in a ‘fundamental maxim’, adopted by free choice, which underlies all the evil actions we perform (R 6: 25).

¹⁷ See, for example, Hare 1996, who stresses a fundamental ‘gap’ between the moral demand on us and our natural capacities to meet it. Hare argues that Kant invokes traditional Christian notions of revelation, providence and God’s grace in order to make sense of this gap, which can only be bridged with God’s assistance.

3. Kantian Virtue

Despite our responsibility for the radical evil in human willing, Kant remains adamant that the restoration of our original innocence is always within our reach. That is to say, with Ricoeur, we remain *capable* of returning to the good which we ‘ought’ to do. For Kant’s moral religion is grounded on a single, crucial, regulative idea or belief: that human beings, despite their propensity to evil, are *fundamentally* innocent; and that there always remains, untainted and uncorrupted, a core original predisposition to good. Consequently, to repeat, for each and every human being, when it comes to morality, ‘ought’ *always* implies ‘can’.

It might come as a surprise to those who have never studied the *Metaphysics of Morals* that Kant places considerable emphasis on the cultivation of *virtue*; and in the *Religion*, this becomes a means of combating – and overcoming – radical evil. For Kant’s emphasis on virtue seems to run counter to the very purpose – the very necessity – of the Categorical Imperative, which lies in our propensity to subvert our adherence to the moral law we ought to obey when confronted by the lure of heteronomous inclinations. Surely the Categorical Imperative acts as a self-imposed regulative guide by which to measure our maxims precisely because we *lack* the character to reliably act on the proper maxims in the first place?

As we shall discover, Kant’s moral psychology certainly exhibits a healthy scepticism when it comes to adopting moral maxims. In fact, it is this, more than anything, that sets Kant apart from Aristotle’s account of human virtue.¹⁸ And yet Kant is adamant that if we hope to uphold the moral law, to meet the criteria demanded of us by the Categorical Imperative, the surest means to ensure we are adequately equipped to do so is by cultivating a robust moral *character*. Kant defines virtue as a matter of *strength*, which is measured by its

¹⁸ Equally, this draws Kant *closer* to Ricoeur on human fallibility, understood as the ‘disproportion’ at the heart of human being. See *FM*, especially 1-14. See also Anderson 1993: 10-12.

capacity to overcome resistance. A person is therefore more virtuous the greater the struggle of her will in resisting temptations to transgress duties. For Kant, moral strength is an ‘aptitude’ and a subjective perfection of the power of choice, or *Willkür*. So if virtue is a habit, as Aristotle claims (*NE* II.1-3), then Kant will insist that it is a ‘free habit’, and not merely a ‘uniformity in acting that has become a *necessity* through frequent repetition’ (*DV* 6:407). Furthermore, Kant shares Aristotle’s belief that virtue is *acquired* through *practicing* virtuous action (*DV* 6:397). In light of this, the charge that Kant neglects the cultivation of virtuous character seems misplaced.¹⁹ On the contrary, Kant thinks virtue is a capacity that the moral agent is capable of cultivating, and striving to perfect.

A central component of Kant’s *Doctrine of Virtue* is the distinction between *duties of right* and *duties of virtue*. The fundamental difference between these two sets of duties is that while a duty of right can be externally imposed (as the law of a state binds its citizens, say), a duty of virtue must be self-imposed or, in Kant’s words, ‘based only on free self-constraint’ (*DV* 6: 393). Of course, duties of right can also be self-imposed, that is, from the spirit of duty, rather than from fear of external sanction (*DV* 6: 383). But duties of virtue cannot, conversely, be legally enforced. They are a matter of *character*.

This is a crucial distinction to bear in mind when interpreting Kant. For the fact that the term ‘duty’ carries such negative connotations in our everyday usage goes some way to explaining why Kant’s moral philosophy, with its emphatic use of the term, is initially greeted by many as less than appealing. In everyday usage, duty is nearly always associated with some form of external pressure. This thought, especially when applied to the phrase ‘acting from duty’, makes duty the very last word anyone would associate with autonomy or the free self-direction of one’s life. As Allen Wood memorably puts it, ‘[i]f I say that I am

¹⁹ Such is the charge implicit in Rorty’s allegation (section 1, above).

visiting Aunt Maude in the Alzheimer's ward "solely from duty," that means I am doing it grudgingly, probably cowed into it by the thought of the dirty looks and nagging phone calls I will otherwise get from my overbearing parents and disapproving siblings' (Wood 2008: 159). It is for this reason that Kant's classification of duties of virtue as strictly self-imposed is so important. For duty here simply refers to the act of *freely* making oneself desire something and do it because one appreciates the objective moral reasons there are for doing it. There are no external reasons for action, only moral reasons (as distinct from merely instrumental or prudential reasons).²⁰

Kant's conception of virtue lays specific stress on the strength of the will in constraining itself, in obeying an internal sanction. But Kant also insists that virtue involves not only the capacity to resist one's inclinations when they are contrary to duty, but also the capacity to '*master* one's inclinations' (*DV* 6:380, 6:383). In other words, it is a duty of virtue to *transform* our natural inclinations in ways that align with morality. This transformation also involves working up our natural inclinations to support that principle. In Kant's own words:

When it is said that it is in itself a duty for a human being to make his end the perfection belonging to a human being as such (properly speaking, to humanity), this perfection must be put in what can result from his *deeds*, not in mere *gifts* for which he must be indebted to nature; for otherwise it would not be a duty. This duty can therefore consist only in *cultivating* one's *faculties* (or natural predispositions), the highest of which is *understanding*, the faculty of concepts and so too of those concepts that have to do with duty. At the same time this duty includes the cultivation of one's *will* (moral cast of mind), so as to satisfy all the requirements of duty. (*DV* 6:386-7)

²⁰ For a Kantian defence of internal reasons for action as moral reasons, see Korsgaard 1996: 311-334.

However, this inclusion of natural inclinations (correctly cultivated) among the virtuous person's attributes is tempered when Kant claims, just a few lines later, that as a human being one has the duty of cultivating one's will 'up to the *purest* virtuous disposition, in which the *law* becomes also the incentive to his actions that conform with duty and he obeys the law from duty' (*DV* 6:387).²¹ Kant seems to be issuing two demands here. On the one hand, we are to develop our talents and emotional capacities as part of virtue; in this sense, Kant seems to conceive of virtue along the Aristotelian model of character habituation. But on the other hand, we are nevertheless to develop a purer attitude of virtue, which is grounded in and responds to the rational nature of persons as end-in-themselves, and moral legislators. These two demands imply that while we need to cultivate our natural inclinations to support our capacity to act from autonomous principles, the latter remain, in the purest sense, the source of morality. But this then raises the question as to how genuine Kant's appeal to natural inclinations really is. Does Kant, in the end, share Aristotle's belief that properly cultivated emotions are indispensable to the good life? Or does his appeal to the cultivation of inclinations compatible with virtue, in the end, amount to little?

There are two significant reasons to think that Kant *does* support the cultivation of inclinations compatible with virtue. First, by arguing that the *ultimate* ground of morality must rest in the authority of reason, Kant is making a metaphysical – and, by extension, ontological – point. Reason is the ground of moral deliberation. Morality is rooted in the rational *nature* of human beings; and rationality is, in Ricoeur's Kantian terms, a fundamental capability that lies anterior to any corruption by external sources. For Kant, to be human is to be rational, and this is an a priori truth contained in the concept of a human being. Like Spinoza's rational *conatus*, Kant's human being has a rational nature. So Kant appeals to the rationality

²¹ Emphasis added for 'purest'. Original emphasis for 'law'.

of human beings, meaning not to any particular faculty, nor even to bare reason itself, but rather to the *fundamentally rational nature of humanity*. Since rationality is an attribute of humanity, to be human is to be rational, and so worthy of respect, regardless of the shape of one's cognitive capacities.²² This fact proves deeply important for understanding Kant's religion as moral life.

Second, while Kant argues that the ultimate ground of a moral project must rest in the *authority* of reason, he does not deny that natural inclinations can be shaped by and respond to that authority. Rather he claims that this responsiveness to morality is rooted in the rational nature of persons; humanity flourishes best in persons who have properly cultivated their emotional capacities. There is a noticeable emphasis in the *Doctrine of Virtue* on the *character* of persons who will act in morally worthy ways from a pure attitude of virtue. The thought is that the virtuous person is the one who cultivates emotions that do not battle with her duty, but positively promote it. Such emotions are not themselves expressive of the purest attitude of virtue, since they are not themselves the ultimate source of adequate reasons for doing what is required or determining what is morally permissible. However, they form a crucial dimension of character that, ultimately, best supports moral motivation. With this Kantian picture of character-formation in mind, then, we can begin, with Ricoeur, to see Kant in line with both Aristotle – insofar as properly cultivated virtues best enable moral action – and Spinoza – insofar as emotions are seen as positive enablers provided they are under our control.

²² This serves to dispel the well-known criticism that Kant's moral philosophy discriminates against the mentally disabled on the basis that their inability to reason properly deprives them of the grounds for respect and thus of human dignity.

4. Kant's Humanity

4.1 The Strenuous Way of virtue

In the *Religion*, Kant distinguishes three predispositions in human nature which contribute to a hierarchically structured account of moral character: the predisposition to *animality* as a mere living being; the predisposition to *humanity* as a living and rational being; and the predisposition to *personality* as a living, rational and responsible being. The predisposition to animality concerns self-love expressed in our impulses for self-preservation, propagation of the species, and community with other human beings. The predisposition to humanity concerns self-love expressed in our cultural strivings and social dependence upon and rivalry with others. Finally, the predisposition to personality is the capacity to hold ourselves morally accountable by justifying our actions in terms of autonomously generated moral principles. All of these predispositions are intrinsic parts of human nature which, when properly transformed and ordered, form a more inclusive, composite conception of good moral character. As Kant explains:

...these predispositions in the human being are not only (negatively) *good* (they do not resist the moral law) but they are also predispositions *to the good* (they demand compliance with it). (R 6:28).

For Kant, then, a well-regulated character is not simply a matter of the absence of counter-incentives. The goal is rather to *transform* our self-love so that it promotes and advances compliance with the moral law. Moreover, Kant's language suggests that cultivated natural and social powers are not simply necessary conditions of moral agency, but necessary,

hierarchically structured *parts* of the overall character of the original predisposition of a human being to achieve the moral good.

Kant shares with Aristotle the idea that virtue can only be achieved as the result of habituation.²³ But he departs from Aristotle in stressing the ‘incessant labouring and becoming’ involved in this process (R 6:48). Whereas Aristotle’s account of virtuous action involves the non-rational part of the soul listening to the rational part, Kant’s account of practical reason simply involves the will, which itself directly produces desires, both good and bad, depending on its predisposition to good or propensity to evil.²⁴ Accordingly, and to a far greater extent than Aristotle, Kant never loses sight of the ‘invisible enemy’ which always threatens to corrupt us, no matter how nobly we strive to adopt the proper maxim.²⁵ Consequently, Kant understands the pursuit of virtue as a *constant struggle* to ensure that we continue to adopt the moral law as our maxim. Because our conformity to reason must take the form of self-constraint (faced with the natural pull of heteronomous inclinations), virtue is constantly required if we are to follow rational principles, which may command unconditionally, but become subjectively ‘irresistible’ only through virtue’ (DV 6: 405). In this respect, Kant arguably provides us with a more graphic – and fitting – account of the extent of the constant *internal* struggle involved in the cultivation of moral character than

²³ Indeed, Kant’s hierarchically structured account of moral character echoes the ancient project of ordering the parts of the human ‘soul’ and rendering them harmonious.

²⁴ To repeat what was stated above in note 2, the difference between Kant and Aristotle here is obviously explained by the influence of Augustine on Kant. Because he is writing after Augustine, Kant is writing with a conception of the *will* as a matter of spontaneous volition, as opposed to Aristotle’s narrower conception of volition as preferential choice. As Ricoeur comments on the legacy of the Augustinian conception of the will: ‘Whereas the Aristotelian will was limited to the choice of means, with Augustine the human will is...[a matter of] absolute choice’ (Ricoeur 1978a: 62-63).

²⁵ For the choice of a maxim is not one isolated decision, but one that must be constantly renewed (hence the virtue of the moral agent who has the strength to continually renew this decision). In Kant’s own words, it is ‘an ever-continuing striving for the better...a *gradual* reformation of the propensity to evil’ grafted onto us by society (R 6:48. Emphasis added).

Aristotle; for the latter's anthropology is largely directed toward the *external* constraints that inhibit virtuous character.

Admittedly, as seen in chapter 2, Aristotle does concede that external constraints may become internalised, cramping the development of virtue. So to a certain degree, Kant and Aristotle would both agree that constant setbacks, for example, may damage an agent's confidence, diminishing her capacity to properly undertake certain initiatives central to what Aristotle would call the life of virtue.²⁶ Nevertheless, Kant's account of the strenuous way of virtue is rendered unique by his resolute conviction in original human goodness.

4.2 'Original Innocence'

Kant's conviction that, despite our propensity to evil, there is an original predisposition to good that remains forever incorruptible, is threaded through the four books of the *Religion*. Understood in light of the struggle to cultivate moral character, we can understand this conviction of Kant as a regulative *ideal*. The perfection of one's virtue is the ideal toward which the human being should always strive, because, as *originally* good or innocent, she is always *fundamentally* capable of hoping to attain this perfection, no matter how tainted she may be by the corruption of radical evil.

The original predisposition to good appears to run counter to the Christian doctrine of original or hereditary sin.²⁷ Human beings, on Kant's reading, are not born as evil. Instead, although the root of radical evil is philosophically inscrutable, *moral* evil lies strictly within the bounds of human volition. As each human being is born originally innocent, so she is culpable for the subversion of the moral law to her heteronomous inclinations. As Kant

²⁶ cf. Chapter 2, section 3.2.

²⁷ For Ricoeur's use of original innocence and discussion of Augustine, see Ricoeur 1960 (especially 267ff. and 276). For Ricoeur's discussion of Kant's opposition to original sin, see Ricoeur 1995a: 80.

explains, moral evil must ‘always be a deed of freedom’, for otherwise ‘the use or abuse of the human being’s power of choice with respect to the moral law could not be imputed to him, nor could the good or evil in him be called “moral”’ (R 6:21).²⁸

It is for this reason that Kant configures the biblical narrative of the Fall in Genesis 3 as a story about a universal aspect of lived (human) experience, rather than a single, unique event at the beginning of (human) history. Adam, on this reading, should be understood as the universal representative of every human being, since ‘it is clear...that this [acting freely, but always with our propensity to evil] is what we do daily, and that hence [in *non-historical*, narrative terms] in Adam we have all sinned’ (R 6:42). Of course, this brings us no closer to an intelligible explanation concerning the origin of evil. Yet the image we gain from the text is still significant. For, as Kant notes, it portrays ‘evil at the beginning of the world, not, however, within the human being, but in a *spirit* of an originally more sublime destiny’ (R 6:43-44). This means that the narrative story of evil is not recounting an historical event. Instead, it is a paradigmatic account of human willing.²⁹ This paradigm, then, describes a non-specific ‘beginning’ that portrays evil coming from ‘outside’ the human as originally created. Clearly, Kant takes the Genesis narrative to imply that Adam’s ‘fall’ from innocence is an act of free will, not an expression of fundamental corruption. The narrative depicts Adam *falling* from innocence (through an act of free will), ‘not as corrupted *fundamentally*’ (R 6:44).

Ricoeur reads this story in Kant’s *Religion* philosophically:

²⁸ An unsavoury consequence of Kant’s theory is that, insofar as *any* of us subvert the moral law in favour of heteronomous maxims, we are *all* evil. Evil lies simply in the failure to make the moral law one’s incentive. In his otherwise sympathetic account, Richard Bernstein is heavily critical of Kant on this point: ‘following out the logic of Kant’s rigorous analysis, there does not seem to be any way to avoid the conclusion that a benign sympathetic person (who gives the incentive of sympathy priority over the moral law in his maxim), Hitler, and even Eichmann (whose maxims presumably did not give priority to respect for the moral law) are *all* morally evil. Kant would certainly acknowledge that there are differences among them. Despite his ‘official’ doctrine, he recognizes such differences. Nevertheless, given the exclusive rigorist disjunction – good or evil – we must judge them to be evil. What they have in common is ‘the failure to make the thought of duty or respect for the law the sufficient motivation for one’s conduct’ (Bernstein 2002: 19).

²⁹ See Anderson 1993: 79-114.

...however radical evil may be as the a priori principle of every bad maxim, it does not occupy the originary place, which is that of the predisposition to good, the ultimate condition of respect for the law. Ought we not then to say that the recognition of this fundamental paradox works like a philosophical midrash with regard to the biblical narrative about the fall? This latter recounts as an event the passage from the innocence of the creature to guilt, and the antignostic gnosis of Augustine hardens this narrative into a kind of rationalised myth where the state of sin succeeds the state of innocence. In Kant's philosophical midrash, this paradox is presented as a double inherence, as the surimpression of the propensity on the predisposition. In this sense, *radical evil is not original sin*. Only beings who remain *capable* of respect can consciously do evil. However radical it may be, evil cannot bring it about that we cease being open to the appeal of conscience. (Ricoeur 1995a: 80. Emphasis added.)

Following Ricoeur, we can take it that when Kant insists that the cultivation of virtue is a strenuous matter, this should not be taken as an ontological claim about a fundamentally corrupt human nature. Instead, with Ricoeur, we should treat Kant's argument *hermeneutically*. The result of this Ricoeurian hermeneutics is a Kantian mistrust of our natural inclinations which continues to hold fast to a conviction in a fundamental human goodness or capability. In turn, this mistrust of natural inclinations can be attributed to a mistrust of *all* human behaviour, to the extent that it has been shaped *by society*.

4.3 Kant and Rousseau: Unsociable Sociability

Kant's radical evil is cognitively inscrutable. No a priori arguments can, in Kant's words, demonstrate the existence of 'this propensity to evil in human nature' (R 6:35). Nevertheless, Kant wishes to argue that the emergence of *moral* evil can be traced to the human trait of unsociable sociability.³⁰ In other words, moral evil pertains to us *insofar as we are social beings*. It is bound up with our tendencies to compare ourselves with others and compete with them for self-worth (Wood 1999: 287), and arises out of our 'inclination to create a worth for oneself in the opinion of others, [occasioned] by the concerned attempts of others to gain a hated superiority over us' (R 6:27; Wood 1999: 287-288).

Kant explicitly attributes the corruption of human nature to the *social* condition of human beings. This corruption arises from the concern over comparative self-worth that characterises people whenever they live in proximity to one another. Kant holds that our natural inclinations, considered in abstraction from the effects of society, as mere expressions of our bodily or animal nature, are morally neutral, and are only corrupted by 'an invisible enemy, one who hides behind reason and is hence all the more dangerous' (R 6:57) This enemy, however, is not original sin, but rather the 'vices of *culture*' (6:27): the competitiveness, social inequality, 'the unjust desire to acquire superiority for oneself over others' (6:27), the 'radical propensity to evil' which develops along with our reason, and hence *only* in society (6:30). As he explains:

It is not the instigation of nature that arouses what should properly be called the *passions*, which wreak such great devastation in his originally good disposition...Envy, addiction to power, avarice, and the malignant inclinations associated with these, assail his nature,

³⁰ See Anderson-Gold 1991; cf. Wood 1999: 287.

which on its own is undemanding, *as soon as he is among human beings*. Nor is it necessary to assume that these are sunk into evil and are examples that lead him astray: it suffices that they are, that they surround him, and that they are human beings, and they will mutually corrupt each other's moral disposition and make one another evil. (R 6:93-94).

Why does Kant go to such lengths to emphasise the social origins of evil? Why risk the inevitable tension that arises when this account, which dominates book III of the *Religion*, is compared to the carefully plotted metaphysical exposition of book I, the moral psychology which concludes that the origin of evil in the human will is ultimately *inscrutable*? Kant's increasingly resolute insistence on a social account of evil reflects the influence upon his writings of Rousseau's moral anthropology.³¹ Like Kant after him, Rousseau considers humanity to be good in the 'natural' (the pre-social) state, because he considers all human wickedness and misery to be the consequence of the social condition, and the trait of *amour-propre*, which human beings begin to display as soon as they enter it. As Allen Wood observes, Rousseau's *amour-propre* is the same trait as Kant's 'self-conceit' or 'ambition' – 'the sense of comparative self-worth and the desire to achieve superior worth in the eyes of others' – which constitutes, in Kant's view, the radical propensity to evil in human nature (Wood 1999: 291).

It might be objected that this emphasis on the influence of Rousseau fails to appreciate sufficiently the background for Rousseau's own belief in the corrupting influence of society. Specifically, one might object that it fails to recognise that Rousseau identifies the social condition which yields the emergence of moral evil as the byproduct of a departure

³¹ The themes addressed in Karl Ameriks's recent paper, 'Kant, Human Nature, and History after Rousseau', helpfully reflect the recent resurgence of interest in Rousseau's influence on Kant among contemporary scholars. See Ameriks 2010.

from a garden paradise which sustains its own state of innocence (not unlike Eden).³² But this objection fails to recognise that the garden functions in Rousseau's state of nature story to represent a state of innocence that is entirely *amoral*. For while Rousseau believes that the social condition is accompanied by the possibility for evil, it is equally accompanied by the possibility for good that would not itself arise in the garden. It is only in *society* that the moral life is possible because, as seen in Ricoeur's 'little ethics', it is only with and for others that the ethical aim of the good life can be properly pursued, let alone realised.³³ So to be moral, as Rousseau depicts it, we need to leave the garden, and its accompanying state of amoral innocence. But this departure from the garden comes at a price. For as your capacity to do good increases, your capacity to do evil increases in equal measure (Rousseau 1969: 172-176). The vulnerability that comes from living with and among others, so prominent in both Spinoza and Aristotle, is equally prominent in Rousseau's moral anthropology and, as seen in earlier chapters, is central to Ricoeur's hermeneutics of ethical life.

It is important to recognise that at no stage does Rousseau present the emergence of evil in the social condition as inevitable. Human beings are not inherently perverse; there is nothing necessary about moral evil. In Ricoeurian terms, the human remains fundamentally good or capable; the manifestation of capability on the anthropological plane as either capacities or incapacities is entirely contingent. So moral evil, far from being necessary, results instead from an exhaustive catalogue of individual errors, each of which could have been avoided if different choices had been made – if, argues Rousseau, the individuals concerned

³² See Rousseau 1987. Henceforth *D*. This is, of course, Rousseau's version of the State of Nature story employed by various Enlightenment political theorists. Like Kant's reconfiguration of the Genesis story (and Ricoeur's reading of Kant's reconfiguration), Rousseau's state of nature is emphatically not to be taken as an historical event, but rather as a paradigm for the development of the human propensity for evil.

³³ More could be developed here in relation to Ricoeur's premise concerning 'the good life, with and for others, in just institutions.' Ricoeur is using Rawlsian imagery here, so it's arguable that, to this extent, he is also assuming a state of nature. The theme of justice features prominently in the 'little ethics', where Ricoeur takes great care to consider the different factors that go into the Enlightenment idea of justice (*OA* 194-202, 227-239).

had made *proper* use of their reason. The rational nature of humanity is a double-edged sword; reason can be wielded just as effectively to deceive as it can to enlighten. As Susan Neiman explains, self-knowledge ‘is rare because we’re masters of self-deception.’ Yet at the same time, ‘it’s crucial because viewing ourselves through others’ opinions perpetuates alienation and vanity...Knowledge of ourselves as individuals teaches us to distinguish our own true needs from the false ones that cloud all our efforts at virtue.’ (Neiman 2002: 51). It is for this reason that the hermeneutic turn in Ricoeur’s own thought is taken via the three ‘masters of suspicion’, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, who together enable us to undertake a ‘demystification’ of ‘false-consciousness’ (understood as a ‘cultural’ illusion, ‘a dimension of our social discourse’) (Ricoeur 1973: 214). Consciousness, far from being transparent to itself, ‘is at the same time what reveals and what conceals’ (215), and it is this relation of ‘conceal/reveal’ which calls for ‘*hermeneutics*’. For as Ricoeur explains, the task of hermeneutics ‘to distinguish the true sense from the apparent sense’ (215).³⁴

Kant accepts Rousseau’s assumption that there is no return to the amoral (or even pre-moral) innocence of the state of nature. As we have seen, he adopts the Rousseauian idea that the two principal sources of moral evil are *society* and *human willing*. However Kant asserts that these sources are also the key to our liberation. For while it may be in society that the propensity to evil becomes manifest, society itself remains a constant source of good. For as Rousseau also recognised, we ultimately need society if we are to be moral at all. Morality is impossible without community. And while the propensity to evil may be found in the human will, it is that same will which enables us to pursue the path of virtue – to adhere to the moral law in the face of heteronomous inclinations, in the pursuit of unsteady and uncertain

³⁴ The critical function of hermeneutics for Ricoeur is discussed in chapter 4, section 3.1.

progress toward that realm of ends which, we shall discover, constitutes the regulative ideal governing Kant's conception of moral religion.

So while Kant may be sceptical about the possibility of cultivating a virtuous moral character, he will never dismiss it as an impossibility. His unwavering belief in an original predisposition to good grounds the conviction that the human remains forever capable of cultivating a virtuous moral character. And yet at the same time, Kant does not think that moral character is something we can ever achieve in isolation. The struggle against evil is a social problem and, as such, requires a social solution:³⁵

Human beings (as we have remarked above) mutually corrupt one another's moral predisposition and, even with the good will of each individual, because of the lack of a principle which unites them, they deviate through their dissensions from the common goal of goodness, as though they were *instruments of evil*, and expose one another to the danger of falling once again under its dominion. (R 6:97)

The cultivation of moral character therefore presents itself as a goal to be pursued in concert with like others:

The highest moral good will not be brought about solely through the striving of one individual person for his own moral perfection but requires rather a union of such persons into a whole toward that end (R 6:97-98).

³⁵ This answers the critical question posed in chapter 2, section 3.1, which asked whether Ricoeur's Kantian image of the regeneration of our fundamental goodness was not too optimistic. Kant's account of the cultivation of moral character described here clearly acknowledges the struggle involved in attempting to restore our fundamental goodness, as well as the impossibility of cultivating moral character in isolation. Clearly Kant (and, as the next chapter will reveal, Ricoeur after him) is fully aware of the difficulties involved, so the charge that his account is too optimistic can be dismissed.

As Wood notes, the cultivation of one's own moral character can be distinguished from the moral progress of the human race, but 'the two ends are necessarily linked in their pursuit' (Wood 1999: 314). Because moral character can be cultivated effectively only in concert with like others, the duty to promote one's own morality inevitably leads, in Kant's words, to a 'duty *sui generis*, not of human beings toward human beings but of the human race toward itself. For every species of rational beings is objectively – in the idea of reason – destined to a common end, namely the promotion of the highest good as a good common to all' (R 6: 97). Wood explains that, for Kant, the moral progress of the human race is possible 'only through the progressive extension of...a free moral community to more and more people, until it eventually encompasses the entire human race' (Wood 1999: 315; cf. R 6:94). And it is this very ethical community, or 'ethical commonwealth' which represents the regulative ideal governing Kant's moral religion.

5. Kant's Moral Religion

5.1 The Moral Law Within

In the second *Critique*, Kant writes:

The moral law is *holy* (inviolable). A human being is indeed unholy enough but the *humanity* in his person must be holy to him. In the whole of creation everything one wants and over which one has any power can also be used *merely as a means*; a human being alone, and with him every rational creature, is an *end in itself*; by virtue of the autonomy of his freedom he is the subject of the moral law, which is holy. (C2 xxx)

There is no mistaking Kant's religious reverence for morality. Ultimately, it is the universality of 'mere reason' which makes religion moral and morality religious: rationality binds human beings together in respect for one another and for the good represented by the moral law. It is for this reason that the Categorical Imperative, notably in its second formulation, is as religious as it is moral. An inescapable demand to respect what is holy, namely the humanity in each and every fellow rational being as an end-in-itself, is grounded both on a norm that safeguards against the instrumental treatment of others, and also, crucially, on a reverence for 'the moral law within' that can only be described as religious.

As discussed above, the premise of Kant's moral religion is shaped by a deeply held belief in the unique nature of human being as fundamentally *rational*. The distinctiveness of humanity is rationality, and it is this belief in humanity that binds us – that is, in a religion – as rational, and so moral. In turn, this distinctiveness sets humanity apart *as holy*. Each of us is an embodiment of reason, so what we share in humanity is that moral law within our nature as rational beings, which is itself holy.³⁶

5.2 Historical Religions and Moral Religion

Kant's Enlightenment views extend fully to his conception of organised religion. He is generally suspicious of popular religious beliefs and practices, and especially hostile to clerical power. But he is not hostile toward what he understands to be *true religion*. As Wood explains, his attitude toward religion could be compared in this respect to his attitude toward the state:

Political institutions – as they have been, and as they are – represent mainly tyranny and injustice; they are to blame for the terrible social inequalities and for the wars, and

³⁶ See Anderson & Bell 2010: 30, 31ff.

preparation for war, that stifle human potentiality and stand in the ways of progress. But the proper function of the state – the coercive protection of the right of rational beings to external freedom – is indispensable to human life. Without it neither culture nor moral progress would be possible (Wood 2005: 179).

Analogously, what we might call ‘historical religions’ have typically arisen out of ‘superstitious fear, a slavish cast of mind, and the ruthless ambition of priests to subject even the inner life of human beings to their tyrannical tutelage’ (Wood 2005: 179-80). By contrast, the proper function of religion is to bind human beings together in the collective moral improvement of the human race, aiming at the restoration of that fundamental goodness overshadowed – but never completely destroyed – by the corrupting influence of society. Kant views such a religion as indispensable to the cultivation of moral character: we can no more expect to fulfil our vocation as moral beings apart from religion than we can expect to achieve justice through anarchy.

Kant’s moral religion can thus be likened to a civic or common religion: a distinctly democratic, shared moral perspective which is social, universal, and bound up with autonomy and rationality. It therefore differs from historical religions, which are inextricably bound up with a heteronomous allegiance to particular institutions – the very thing Kant rallies so ardently against in his attack on ‘counterfeit service’ and ‘priestcraft’ in book IV of the *Religion*.³⁷ At the same time, it is important to recognise that Kant – like Rousseau before him – is not framing true moral religion and historical religions as mutually exclusive. Rather a healthy society can only flourish if the common, civic religion or faith that binds its citizens together is preserved *alongside* the right of each individual to their own private beliefs, and

³⁷ Kant presents the distinction as follows: ‘There is only *one* (true) *religion*; but there can be various kinds of *faith*’ (R. 6:107).

their own independence of thought – including the right to their own religion – lest we slip into the very tyranny and slavish cast of mind from which Kant seeks to liberate us in the first place. Kant’s moral religion is thus a rational attempt to articulate and promote the dignity of each individual within a moral idiom of traditions and commitment to a common good.³⁸ It therefore constitutes a positive counterpoint to the tendency of human beings in society toward unsociable sociability – the competitiveness, inequality and seeking of superiority over other human beings – by establishing a rule of reason which dictates that all human beings are equals in dignity as ends in themselves. Moral religion establishes rule by the laws of the realm of ends, laws that command us to seek unity among human ends rather than self-seeking and competition.

The task of morally improving ourselves, both as individuals and as a rational species, depends upon a certain kind of society that is devoted to combating the radical propensity to evil and furthering the ideal of a realm of ends on earth. Kant refers to this community or society as an ‘ethical commonwealth’ (R 6:97). This ethical commonwealth differs significantly from a political community. Its laws are not statutes derived from arbitrary human authority; rather it enjoys the ‘sovereignty of the good principle’, that is, the moral law (Michalson 1999: 105). Kant explains:

An association of human beings merely under the laws of virtue, ruled by this idea, can be called an *ethical* and, so far as these laws are public, an *ethico-civil* (in contrast to a *juridico-civil*) society, or an *ethical community*. It can exist in the midst of a political community and even be made up of all the members of the latter...It has however a special unifying

³⁸ For the distinction between civic and historical religion – particularly as it is framed in Rousseau’s thought – and its relevance for conflicts between public and private life, and the role of religion in the public sphere, see Cladis 2007: xxi-lvi.

principle of its own (virtue) and hence a form and constitution essentially distinct from those of the other. (R. 6:94).

So whereas the laws of a political community concern only coercive laws which compel only outward compliance to established laws among citizens, a moral community is concerned fundamentally with the free, inward adoption of maxims derived from the moral law, enabling the gradual inward improvement of the dispositions of its members – in other words, the cultivation of moral character. *Moral religion*, then, derives from the *social* character of our highest end as rational, social beings. In my pursuit of the highest good as a social good, I must recognise the moral law not only as pertaining to me as a rational being, but also as ‘a law binding morally on all rational beings, a law which obliges me to see myself as part of a *moral unity with such persons, a member of a Kingdom of Ends*’ (Wood 1970: 191. Emphasis added).³⁹

5.3 Hope in the Common Rational Pursuit of the Good Life

Kant’s moral religion yields a vision of an ethical commonwealth – a kingdom of ends – where true religion and Enlightenment reason converge. How, then, to reconcile Kant’s vision with the everyday realities of contemporary societies increasingly shaped by clashes of identities often saturated with religious elements, where the definition and role of religion in

³⁹Gordon Michalson argues that the conception of an ‘ethical commonwealth’ represents a shift in Kant’s thought away from an otherworldly to a this-worldly frame of reference. Michalson claims that this shift is indicative of a tension that runs throughout all of Kant’s thought between the Protestant Christian tradition and the Enlightenment rationalist tradition. The ‘concept of the ethical commonwealth’, he writes, ‘in fact displaces Kant’s postulate of the immortality of the soul in the depiction of moral perfection...The clear implication of such a transition would be that, as Kant’s sense of the social aspect of moral agency assumes greater refinement, his account of divine transcendence becomes even more attenuated. The already limited divine intervention that is associated with the realisation of the highest good is now further diluted by corporate moral agency within the immanent sphere of history...Consequently, even if there remains a role for God to play in the achievement of moral perfection, it is a role that has been brought down to earth from the noumenal realm and is inextricably bound up with human history itself. One way or another, heaven is absorbed by earth’ (Michalson 1999: 100-101, ff.; cf. also Michalson 1991).

the public sphere are matters of continual tension? Surveying the contemporary landscape, it would be easy to dismiss Kant's moral religion as a noble but ultimately impossibly optimistic prototype for human societies, based on an utterly misplaced conviction in the inevitability of human progress and the triumph of reason.

However, to dismiss Kant's moral religion on these grounds is to miss what is most compelling in his vision. For despite society's failure to live up to Kant's lofty expectations, his moral religion nevertheless embodies an Enlightenment *hope* that many of us still share. Kant's moral religion embodies hope in human progress toward a realm of ends in which the divisions between people will be overcome, and hope that humanity will be ultimately united in a cosmopolitan moral community which respects the rights of everyone and unites the happiness of all as a shared end of human striving (Wood 2005: 186). Indeed, Wood reminds us that this was the very hope declared by Kant at the close of his lectures on anthropology, the last work published under Kant's name and, as such, what may be seen as literally his final perspective on the moral life and radical evil. Kant writes as follows:

In working against the [evil] propensity [in human nature]...our will is in general good, but the accomplishment of what we will is made more difficult by the fact that the attainment of the end can be expected not through the free agreement of *individuals*, but only through the progressive organisation of citizens of the earth into and toward the species as a system that is cosmopolitically combined. (*Anth.* 7:333)

Kant's moral religion represents the unification of both his moral and religious thought. At the same time, it suggests also that ultimately the two cannot be properly grasped apart from one another and, significantly, that his entire philosophical enterprise can be seen

as governed by this religious ideal of the moral community. For only by understanding Kant's moral philosophy as inherently religious, and his religious philosophy as inherently moral, can we fully appreciate his unerring conviction – articulated in the *Religion* – that the human being, 'despite a corrupted heart...always possesses a good will, [and] there still remains hope of a return to the good from which he has strayed' (R 6:44). This is the essence of Kant's moral religion.

6. Kant's place in Ricoeur's architectonic

6.1 Spinoza and Kant

As chapter 1 established, the considerable differences between Spinoza and Kant – principally over their conceptions of human freedom and the individual – do not necessarily render them incompatible and, as such, do not necessarily diminish Ricoeur's architectonic.⁴⁰ That Ricoeur can succeed in rendering two seemingly disparate figures compatible is made possible, in part, by the structure of his architectonic. Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant inform the *different levels* constituting Ricoeur's moral religion – metaphysical, anthropological, and moral. As a result, the particular aspects of their philosophies hermeneutically appropriated by Ricoeur do not come into irresolvable conflict. Instead they contribute to a broader, richer philosophy of religion than could be achieved by any of their respective philosophies in isolation. Spinoza's concept of *conatus* forms the metaphysical basis of Ricoeur's moral religion. This grounds an anthropology of human capacities informed by Aristotle's ethics, which is in turn framed by the deontological demands of Kant's morality. Yet Kant adds a further dimension to Ricoeur's architectonic beyond the regulative limits established by his

⁴⁰ See chapter 1, section 5.

deontology. For there is a real sense in which Ricoeur's metaphysical vision of human capability constitutes a fusion of Spinozist and Kantian ideas. Ricoeur's attestation that to be human is to be capable assumes both Spinoza's *conatus*, manifest in Ricoeur's 'desire to be' and 'effort to exist', and Kant's fundamental goodness; capability is tantamount to goodness.

In *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Ricoeur posits an explicit connection between Kant's morality and his own 'fundamental ontology of power and act'; the latter, he argues, emerges in Kant's text 'on the borders of moral philosophy'. This leads Ricoeur to assert that: '[a]s radical as evil may be...it is not original. Radical is the "propensity" to evil, *original* is the "predisposition" to good' (Ricoeur 2004b: 491. Emphasis added).⁴¹

It is in this attestation of primordial goodness that Ricoeur's long-held Kantian commitments converge with his appropriation of Spinoza's metaphysics. Previously understood in terms of Spinoza's *conatus* as the striving to persist in one's own being (or as the 'desire to be' and 'effort to exist'), Ricoeur's capable human becomes enriched with the distinctly moral Kantian conception of primordial goodness.

This conception of primordial goodness also leads Ricoeur to posit 'a strong connection between...the idea of capability and the purpose of any religious thinking.' As Ricoeur explains, *belief in the fundamental nature of the human as capable* represents a crucial tool at the disposal of all religions with which to respond to the challenge of evil. To repeat Ricoeur's quote from the beginning of the chapter in full:

Here I repeat my debt to Kant's *Religion*...As radical as evil may be, it will never be more originary than goodness, which is the *Ursprung* in the field of ethics, *the orientation to the good as being rooted in the ontological structure of the human being*...I affirm it is important for the basic

⁴¹ cf. *FM* 145: 'However primordial badness may be, goodness is yet more primordial.'

signification of religion at large...all religions are different attempts in different language games to *recover the ground of goodness*, to liberate, so to say, the enslaved freedom, the *enslaved capability*. *We have to look at the problem of evil in terms of some specific loss of capability* as we have it in the symbolic language of slavery, self-inflicted incapability. This does not suppress the mysterious character of evil, but puts it in the light of an all-encompassing ontology (Ricoeur 2002: 284-285. Emphasis added).

It is in this respect that Domenico Jervolino interprets Ricoeur's capable human as 'the person to whom life is donated and, ultimately, the addressee of religion.'⁴² In strongly Kantian terms, Jervolino argues that religion is what finally offers us a *global* perspective on people and, crucially, on the possibility of recovering or curing their constitutive powers, beyond individual actions: 'recovering an original goodness beyond radical evil' (Jervolino 2008: 229). So in this sense, Ricoeur's hermeneutic reflection on the capable human, while structured by Spinoza's conception of *conatus*, is governed by a Kantian aim: the attempt to 'recover the *hidden truth* of our operative acts, of *being capable*, of being *un homme capable*' (Ricoeur 2004a: 167. Emphasis added), in the hope of restoring the primordial goodness that lies anterior to the evil acts that stain, but never completely destroy, human capability (cf. *SE*).

6.2 Aristotle and Kant

In the case of Aristotle, a profound tension presents itself. Ricoeur places Kant's morality at a level distinct from Aristotle's anthropology: the deontology of the former serves to regulate the individual's pursuit of her own good in the latter. However, in doing so, Ricoeur is still left with two different views of ethics, deontological and teleological respectively. Moreover,

⁴² cf. Ricoeur 2000a: 211. cf. also section 1 of this chapter, note 6.

both of these views are irreversibly altered by Ricoeur's modifications, which raises the further question as to how much modification can realistically be undertaken before the result ceases to be either Aristotelian or Kantian in any recognisable form.⁴³ In sum, how does Ricoeur propose to render compatible two different systems of ethics if that rendering risks diluting either or both of the systems to such a degree that the final result fails to represent adequately even a trace of either system?

The aim of the next chapter is to demonstrate that this challenge poses no decisive threat to Ricoeur's architectonic. On the contrary, it is a challenge Ricoeur need not confront. Ricoeur is not attempting to resolve the tension between Aristotle and Kant. Rather, it is precisely in their *differences* that he wishes to bring them together. Ricoeur wishes to exploit the tension between the two, which enables him to modify Kantian autonomy with Aristotle's anthropology of human vulnerability and Spinoza's metaphysics of dynamic life.

Arguably, in developing this framework, Ricoeur fails to adequately represent Kant and Aristotle in other ways. For example, as seen in this chapter, there is a sense in which Ricoeur's Kant (or rather the Kant Ricoeur brings into conversation with Aristotle in the little ethics) is too formalist.⁴⁴ By emphasising Kant's *deontology*, Ricoeur overlooks Kant's sensitivity to virtue and practical wisdom. Ironically, however, Kant's conception of virtue brings him closer to Aristotle – and Ricoeur's own overall position – than Ricoeur seems willing to acknowledge.

Nevertheless, these three chapters have aimed to establish that a hermeneutic engagement with Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant offers a wealth of resources for thinking about religion and moral life, and that a unifying vision of the three for a contemporary moral religion is at least a plausible possibility. How this unifying vision shapes Ricoeur's

⁴³ See chapter 1, section 6.

⁴⁴ This issue will be discussed further in chapter 4, sections 3 and 4.

hermeneutics of ethical life, and how successfully the latter establishes a contemporary, moral religion, will be the subject of the remainder of this thesis.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE REFLEXIVE AUTONOMY OF RICOEUR

‘Reflexion is that act of turning back upon itself by which a subject grasps, in a moment of intellectual clarity and moral responsibility, the unifying principle of the operations among which it is *dispersed* and forgets itself as subject.’

(Ricoeur, ‘On Interpretation’, 12).

1. Introduction

The previous three chapters have argued that Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of ethical life enables us to interpret religion through a threefold architectonic encompassing metaphysical, anthropological and moral life. It has been argued that this threefold architectonic is structured by Ricoeur’s appropriation of Spinoza’s metaphysics, Aristotle’s anthropology, and Kant’s moral philosophy. A critical question remains to be answered; what is it about Ricoeur’s threefold architectonic that leads us to a *moral religion*?

This thesis proposes two answers to this question, which will be elucidated and defended in the remaining chapters. First, in connection with its Latin root, *religare* (‘to bind fast’), as what binds people together,¹ religion will be intimately connected with life. ‘Life’ is understood as what binds all people together on the basis of what we share as human beings: we are given life, develop, come to fullness of life and to the end to life. As the introduction

¹ See Introduction, section 3.2.

established, life is the universal quality that provides an inalienable common bond for religion. In the next chapter, it will be concluded that Ricoeur's appropriation of Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant unveils the three dimensions of life – metaphysical, anthropological, and moral – which are shared by all human beings in their however distinctive pursuits of the good.

The second answer, which will be proposed in the present chapter, is that the *reflexive* nature of Ricoeur's philosophy renders his religion 'moral', in the sense of autonomous and rational. More specifically, Ricoeur's reflexive conceptions of a self and of autonomy necessitate selfhood's intimate connection to otherness, whether to the aporetic Other referred to by Ricoeur variously as God, conscience, Being or the ground of Being² or to those others with and among whom the good life is pursued. For Ricoeur, self and other are both bound together and sustained in what they share as reflexively autonomous agents.³

As will be argued in this chapter, Ricoeur's conception of selfhood depends upon a *reflexivity-conviction* that being oneself inasmuch as other (*soi-même comme un autre*) involves both acting and suffering (OA 20-23; cf. Anderson 2002: 18). This conviction is embedded, in particular, in the relational nature of autonomy; this embeddedness gives a distinctly religious dimension to Ricoeur's hermeneutics of ethical life. In coming to see ourselves as embedded – that is, intimately connected to others – we recognise that, in religious terms, we are bound

² OA 355; cf. Ricoeur 2004a; cf. also Anderson 1994.

³ Ricoeur's reflexivity hinges on an intimate threefold relation between reflection, reflexivity and relationality. Ricoeur's reflexive self undergoes a threefold move as follows: i) beginning with the self; ii) going out away from the self; and iii) returning back into the self enriched by this reflective and relational detour. The detour is reflective insofar as it demands that the self rationally reflect upon her immersion in the various signs, symbols, actions, narratives and institutions in which she is embedded. It is relational insofar as this reflection demands that the self recognise herself as embedded with and among others who depend upon her and upon whom she depends (see section 2.1 for a discussion of this in the main text). Critical questions must be raised here, which this chapter will address. First of all, how does the shape of the reflexive self all-too-briefly outlined here rest alongside Ricoeur's self-professed post-Hegelian Kantianism? Is it Kant or Hegel that ultimately determines the shape of this reflexive self? Is it really post-Hegelian, or rather post-Kantian? And what does the shape of this reflexive self tell us about: a) Ricoeur's own reflexive detour via Hegel and; b) his reflexive return to Kant? How does the detour via Hegel determine Ricoeur's Kantianism? See section 3.3 for a full discussion of these critical questions.

to others by virtue of what we share. Ricoeur's hermeneutics of ethical life elucidates this embeddedness which, in turn, constitutes human being, and the architectonic. The latter, as is being argued in this thesis, can guide and regulate human living with and among others, as a 'moral religion'.

1.1 Reflexive Autonomy: Ricoeur's 'ethical vision of the world'⁴

Two implicit arguments run through this chapter. The first argues that reflexivity constitutes the crucial thread governing Ricoeur's appropriation of Spinoza, Aristotle, and Kant. The reflexive nature of autonomy gives Ricoeur the thread holding Spinoza, Aristotle, and Kant together. This reflexivity renders otherwise vague and disparate concepts in Spinoza's metaphysics, Aristotle's anthropology, and Kant's moral philosophy concrete, embedding them in the ethical life of the self's autonomous agency. But here, Ricoeur's reflexive autonomy makes the human self vulnerable and relational (as with both Spinoza and Aristotle). The freedom of the human self (as with Kant) is always limited by the necessary conditions of his or her finitude, while the self's capacity for autonomous action with and for others is itself vulnerable to natural and historical sources of suffering. As a result, Ricoeur's human agent is equally a patient: this agent is always vulnerable to the actions of others in exactly the same manner that the fortunes of others are influenced by her actions. In other words, as we discovered in our Ricoeurian reading of both Spinoza and Aristotle, to live amongst others is both to depend on others and to have others depend upon me.

Reflexivity shapes the structure of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of ethical life. As will be discovered, by employing a threefold reflexive method⁵, Ricoeur renders concrete the implicit influences of Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant. With Kant, he advocates autonomy; with

⁴ Ricoeur first uses the term 'ethical vision of the world' as early as *Fallible Man* (FM xlvii ff.).

⁵ cf. note 3, where this three-fold move is discussed.

Aristotle, he recognises the embeddedness and vulnerability of the agent to factors beyond her own control; and with Spinoza, he incorporates human relationality into his broader metaphysical conception of dynamic striving.

As previously stated, the latter metaphysical presupposition underlies Ricoeur's ontology: that is, a theory of acting and suffering human being. The threefold architectonic of moral religion, rendered concrete by a reflexivity-conviction, is also reflected in the self's threefold movement: the self moves outside of herself; she encounters and appropriates the various signs, symbols, actions, narratives and institutions that express her desire to be and effort to exist; and she turns back upon herself enriched by this encounter. Reflexivity thus enables Ricoeur to render autonomy not only vulnerable, but also *dynamic*; that is, given content by the dynamic striving that is a defining characteristic of acting and suffering being.⁶ The dynamic distinctiveness of reflexivity in Ricoeur brings morality, anthropology, and metaphysics together, situating ethical life within the historical and material dimensions of human living.

The second implicit argument of this chapter is that a reflexive autonomy structures both Ricoeur's 'little ethics'⁷ and his 'ethical vision of the world'. The latter can be traced at least as far back as *Fallible Man* (*FM* xlvi ff.), where Ricoeur delineates the ethical vision of the world reflexively. He describes the movement of a self outside of itself into the world, which then turns back upon itself enriched by its encounter with the world, as 'a self-

⁶ See section 4.1, below.

⁷ 'Little ethics' is a phrase used by Ricoeur to describe retrospectively the three chapters of *Oneself as Another* in which he draws together the threads of the preceding chapters' hermeneutic account of selfhood to put forward his own constructive ethical theory. See section 5.1, below, for a breakdown of the different chapters or 'studies' of the 'little ethics' (*OA* 169-296). Ricoeur later presents a briefer and more rigorous version of the 'little ethics' in *Reflections on the Just* (2007b, 2007c). Further accounts of the function of the 'little ethics' in *Oneself as Another* can be found in Ricoeur 1998 and 2002.

understanding fraught with meaning' (xlvi).⁸ This ethical vision of the world is still present in the later Ricoeur, and constitutes the guiding ideal of his moral religion.

Notice at this stage that a further claim, initially elaborated in the introduction, and to be recalled in the conclusion, emerges: that the later Ricoeur's moral religion, what he has referred to as his 'philosophical theology or theological philosophy' (Ricoeur 2004a: 167), is latent in all of his writings as far back as the early philosophy of the will. Moral religion deeply enriches our understanding of all of Ricoeur's writings. This is especially true of his 'little ethics', which first emerge in *Oneself as Another*, and are later delineated explicitly in *Reflections on the Just*. Ricoeur's wariness of the human propensity to violence, and his emphasis on solicitude and respect, support the interpretation of this thesis: that his moral religion is, in addition to its Kantian aim, uniquely shaped by his Aristotelian recognition of human vulnerability, and his Spinozist reverence for the whole – whether understood as God, Nature or Life – of which we are all a part (cf. Ricoeur 1999: 44-46).

1.2 From Reflexive Philosophy to Moral Religion: A Sketch

This chapter aims to sketch Ricoeur's reflexive philosophy as it guides and structures an increasingly significant moral religion.⁹

In the following section, Ricoeur's hermeneutics of selfhood, as presented in *Oneself as Another*, is discussed. Here the self is entirely reflexive, predicated on a dialectical model of the self in relation to the other-than-self, wherein the self constantly attempts to interpret the signs, symbols, actions, narratives and institutions in which her life is embedded. Crucially,

⁸ It is no accident that, in this same passage, Ricoeur acknowledges his debt to the French, neo-Kantian reflexive philosopher, Jean Nabert (xlvi).

⁹ It should be clear by now that Ricoeur's reflexivity is emphatically not to be confused with the accounts of reflexivity put forward by Jacques Derrida and other contemporaries of Ricoeur, whether deconstructionist or post-structuralist. For a survey of reflexivity as it is understood by these thinkers, see Lawson 1985.

Ricoeur's well-known account of narrative identity¹⁰ is determined by this model, wherein self-reflexivity incorporates the various discordant events of one's own life story into a concordant whole.

In section 3, Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self is set in the broader context of his post-Hegelian Kantian method. This method is a distinctive feature of Ricoeur's writings (at least, from *Fallible Man* onwards) and, as such, the key to both his understanding of selfhood and his use of reflexive philosophy. Critical questions will also be raised concerning the coherence of this method, his self-description as 'post-Hegelian Kantian', and the possible shortcomings of Ricoeur for the overall argument in this thesis.

In section 4, the relationship between Ricoeur's reflexive philosophy and his treatment of autonomy will be examined. What will emerge is a threefold relation between autonomy, fragility and vulnerability as the core, form, and content of autonomous agency, respectively. This account is structured by Ricoeur's threefold architectonic of moral religion, encompassing Spinoza, Aristotle, and Kant. In addition, Ricoeur's appropriation of these three philosophers together now enables us to understand much better autonomy as reflexive.

In section 5, the relation between Ricoeur's reflexive autonomy and ethical life is considered. This relationship strongly supports the argument that, despite Ricoeur's appropriation of both Spinoza and Aristotle, his ethical outlook remains broadly Kantian. The reflexive nature of autonomy shapes the framework of Ricoeur's 'little ethics', which aims to sustain ethical life in the face of human fallibility and evil.

In section 6, this chapter considers the ways in which reflexive autonomy contributes to Ricoeur's moral religion. Reflexivity grounds Ricoeur's claims to be a post-Hegelian

¹⁰ See *TN* III. See also *OA* 113-168 and Ricoeur 1993.

Kantian philosopher, since his reflexive method is to some degree inherited from twentieth-century French readings of Hegel.¹¹ However, Ricoeur does not follow Hegelian reflexivity to its (totalising) conclusion. Instead, he returns to the boundaries established by Kant.

Ricoeur's return to Kant from Hegel is telling. Despite the human desire to transcend the boundaries of knowledge and embodied finitude, Ricoeur will not relinquish the boundaries imposed by Kant on human knowledge and action. At the same time, Ricoeur shares Kant's desire for a universal religion of reason which binds humans together by virtue of their common rationality. However, as already stated, Ricoeur also claims to modify Kant in isolating vulnerability as another common trait that binds human beings together.¹² Bringing Spinoza and Aristotle into relation with Kant, Ricoeur deepens and enriches the Kantian vision of moral religion as an ethical commonwealth based on a reverence for *life*. The Kantian reverence for humans as rational ends-in-themselves is both enriched by the Spinozist reverence for humans as part of the wider whole otherwise known as God, Nature, or Life, and modified by the Aristotelian recognition that to be human is to be vulnerable.¹³ Nevertheless, Ricoeur's ideal of a universal moral religion remains fundamentally Kantian. It is Kantian in spirit, driven by a reverence and respect for humans as ends-in-themselves. It is Kantian in its rationalist structure, as evidenced by the *tripartite* architectonic appropriating Spinoza, Aristotle, and Kant. Finally, it is Kantian in its aim of confronting evil in attempting to restore or return to the primordial goodness represented by Ricoeur's conception of fundamental human capability.

¹¹ For a comprehensive account of the reception of Hegel in twentieth-century France, see Butler 1987. For an assessment of this movement in the history of French philosophy, and its impact upon Ricoeur, see the discussion of Kojève and Hyppolite in Anderson 1993: 6-9, 21-32.

¹² Although, as chapter 3 discussed, whether or not this claim is entirely fair on Kant is questionable. There are many who read Kant's entire moral philosophy as, amongst other things, a response to the conditions of human vulnerability. See section 4.1 of this chapter. See also Korsgaard 1996, 2009; Sherman 1997.

¹³ cf. Chapter 3, section 5.1; chapter 1, section 2.1; chapter 2, section 3.2.

2. Ricoeur's hermeneutics of selfhood

The three major features of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of selfhood in *Oneself as Another* include: 'the detour of reflection by way of analysis, the dialectic of selfhood and sameness, and finally the dialectic of selfhood and otherness' (OA 16). While it is the third feature, the dialectic of selfhood and otherness, that is of primary interest here, Ricoeur's hermeneutics of selfhood as a whole cannot be understood adequately apart from the first two features, to which we now turn.

2.1 The Detour of Reflection by way of a Hermeneutical Analysis

Ricoeur has consistently stressed the impossibility of direct self-awareness. He rejects, as a point of departure, complete and transparent self-awareness, or the self-evident truth of the *cogito*. As Ricoeur sees it, the truth of the *cogito* is as abstract and empty as it is irreducible. Instead, hermeneutics enables Ricoeur to recognise that for self-awareness even to have content, the self must appropriate the *expressions* of its desire to be and effort to exist¹⁴ in the signs, symbols, actions, narratives and institutions that objectify it. '[T]here is no self-understanding', says Ricoeur, 'that is not *mediated* by signs, symbols, and texts' (Ricoeur 1991: 15). As David Klemm has rightly observed, 'we live deeper than we think'; thinking is always attempting to catch up to itself by recovering the meaning of the self in its acts of existing (Klemm 2008: 48).

¹⁴ cf. Chapter 1's discussion of Spinoza's *conatus* (section 3.1) as the striving or effort to persist in one's own being.

As explained above (1.2), Ricoeur's hermeneutical treatment of selfhood attempts to interpret the vast diversity of signs, symbols, actions, narratives and institutions which *express* a self's desire to be and effort to exist. What is recovered, however, is not supposed to be transparent, but rather a self derived through the *interpretation* of the various expressions amid which the desire to be and effort to exist are dispersed (cf. Venema 2000: 4). Self-awareness is not the starting-point, but rather the goal of philosophical inquiry.

Reflexivity is crucial to this hermeneutical treatment of self-awareness. The French adjective *réflexive* incorporates two meanings that are distinguished in English by *reflective* and *reflexive*. Translators of Ricoeur tend towards the latter, in order to emphasise that Ricoeur's philosophy is subject-oriented; it is reflexive in the subject or self's act of turning back upon herself.¹⁵ However, it is crucial for Ricoeur that reflexivity implies *reflection*; that is, the self's reflecting upon herself, upon her appropriation of the conative expressions which elucidate ethical life¹⁶ in signs, symbols, actions, narratives and institutions. In other words, the self's turning back upon herself is a hermeneutical act of reflection; reflexivity is a distinctive act of reflection. This dual meaning is crucial in order to fully grasp the dynamic *and* reflective nature of reflexivity, as presented by Ricoeur.

2.2 The Dialectic of *idem* and *ipse*

The properly reflexive dimension of selfhood first emerges in a dialectic of *idem*- and *ipse*-identity.¹⁷ Roughly, while *idem* corresponds to the 'what' of personal identity, *ipse* corresponds to the 'who'. *Idem* constitutes the factual, empirical account of an individual

¹⁵ See Kathleen Blamey's notes to her translation of 'On Interpretation' (Ricoeur 1991: 329n.1).

¹⁶ cf. Chapter 1, section 3.3.

¹⁷ This is a well-known topic in Ricoeur scholarship, and will not receive extensive treatment here. See the references in note 10, above. For commentary and critical assessment of Ricoeur on this topic, see Reagan 1996 and Joy (ed.) 1997.

identity's persistence over time. *Iipse* constitutes a more complex account of personal identity encompassing an individual life's stories, commitments and beliefs.

In positing a dialectical relation between *idem* and *ipse*-identity, Ricoeur does not intend a dialectic in the conventional sense of a reciprocal relation between two opposing poles.¹⁸ It is rather more like a dialectic between a straight line and a circle.¹⁹ For while *idem* can be understood straightforwardly as persistence (or uninterrupted continuity) over time, *ipse* is a more complex matter, akin more to a circle of reflexivity, as the self remains (true to) itself *in spite of change*. But this fact can only be *attested to* by the individual, and by the others who affirm the individual's self-constancy.

Hermeneutical analysis of *ipse*-identity thus discloses a deeper ontological dimension to Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self. 'What mode of being,' asks Ricoeur, 'belongs to the self, what sort of being or entity is it?' (*OA* 297). As stated above, Ricoeur is clear that selfhood as *ipse*-identity can only be attested to: 'attestation is the assurance – the credence and the trust – of *existing* in the mode of selfhood' (302).

2.3 Attesting to Oneself inasmuch as Other

Attestation serves also to reveal a further ontological dimension to selfhood; namely, the dialectical model of the self in relation to the other-than-self. Ricoeur defines attestation as the type of certainty, the method of truth, proper to hermeneutic philosophy. Attestation, as a method of truth or a 'kind of belief', distinguishes hermeneutic philosophy from philosophies of the *cogito*, with their claims to complete transparency and certainty:²⁰

¹⁸ cf. the dialectical model (section 1.2) of the self in relation to the other-than-self.

¹⁹ I thank Pamela Anderson for drawing my attention to this analogy.

²⁰ Ricoeur is equally adamant that attestation serves also to distinguish hermeneutics from those philosophies of nihilism which, in the wake of Nietzsche's shattering of the immediacy of Cartesian reflection, haunt the subject's quest for certainty with perpetual doubt.

Attestation presents itself first, in fact, as a kind of belief. But it is not a doxic belief, in the sense in which *doxa* (belief) has less standing than *episteme* (science, or better, knowledge). Whereas doxic belief is implied in the grammar of ‘I believe-that’, attestation belongs to the grammar of ‘I believe-in.’ It thus links up with testimony, as the etymology reminds us, inasmuch as it is in the speech of the one giving testimony that one believes. One can call upon no epistemic instance any greater than that of the belief – or, if one prefers, the credence – that belongs to the triple dialectic of reflection and analysis, of selfhood and sameness [*ipse* and *idem*], and of self and other. (OA 21)

This ‘credence’ above, that belongs to a dialectic of reflection and analysis, is vulnerable to a permanent threat of suspicion. The latter haunts the subject’s claims to *ipse*-identity (hereafter ‘selfhood’). More generally, attestation’s vulnerability characterises the necessarily dialectical relation of oneself to another. In the face of this threat of suspicion, attestation as ‘credence’ becomes ‘a kind of trust’ (22) that seals the intimate relation between self and other. To cite Ricoeur again:

...attestation can be defined as *the assurance of being oneself acting and suffering*. This assurance remains the ultimate recourse against all suspicion; even if it is always in some sense received from another, it still remains *self*-attestation. (22-23).

This dialectic of self and other is implicit in the very title of *Oneself as Another*. As Anderson has persuasively argued, the title in its original French, *Soi-même comme un autre*, can be taken to mean that selfhood (*ipseity*) *implies* otherness. For although *soi-même* is quite literally translated as ‘oneself’, it can also be rendered ‘self-same’ or ‘self-identity’, in order to

emphasize the intended sense of selfhood. And *comme un autre* literally translates ‘as another’: hence, Kathleen Blamey’s translation, *Oneself as Another*. Yet Ricoeur insists that in this context he not only intends a comparison, *like* another. Instead, to the French *comme* he wants us to attach the strong sense of an implication as in the French *soi-même en tant que...autre*; that is, oneself *inasmuch as* other. (Anderson 1994: 67). As Ricoeur himself explains: “The selfhood of oneself implies otherness to so intimate a degree that the one cannot be thought without the other...To “as” I should like to attach a strong meaning, not only that of a comparison (oneself similar to another) but indeed that of implication (oneself inasmuch as being other)’ (OA 3).

This implied interdependence of self and other has significant implications for the reflexive autonomy of Ricoeur. The Ninth Study of *Oneself as Another*²¹ makes clear that autonomy is not the starting-point, but rather the critical pivot of his ‘little ethics’ which cannot be understood apart from the individual’s dual vulnerability to and interdependence with others.

Now, with Ricoeur’s tripartite architectonic of moral religion in mind, the manner in which he modifies the standard formalist Kantian account of autonomy is clearly made possible by the conceptions of corporate living and human vulnerability he appropriates from Spinoza and Aristotle. The Ninth Study urges readers to start with complete action determined for and with others, and then reflect back upon the autonomy of selfhood (OA 116-124, 275-6). Autonomy as a moral capacity is therefore bound up with interdependence or, as Ricoeur has argued elsewhere, the ‘interpersonal’, rather than independence (Ricoeur 2000b: 1, 5-6, 10; cf. Anderson 2002: 17).

²¹ OA 240-296.

2.4 Capability, Self-esteem and Solicitude: A Tri-partite Dialectic

Attestation receives its properly reflexive character in the moment of *self-esteem*, which is equally ethical. Self-esteem arises when the self interprets her own actions as ‘good’ in light of the ‘standards of excellence’ which determine what it is for a particular action in a particular context to count as good.²² However, Ricoeur contends that even if self-esteem originates in ‘the reflexive moment through which the evaluation of certain actions judged to be good are carried back to the author of these actions’, it will remain ‘abstract as long as it lacks the *dialogic structure* which is introduced by reference to *others*’ (OA 172. Emphasis added). This central role held by others in the emergence of self-esteem cannot be overemphasised. In other words, solicitude becomes central. As Ricoeur stresses:

...my thesis is that *solicitude* is not something added on to self-esteem from outside but that it unfolds the *dialogic* dimension of self-esteem...such that *self-esteem and solicitude cannot be experienced or reflected upon one without the other*’ (OA 180. Emphasis added).

With solicitude as the necessary counterpart to self-esteem, the self becomes dependent upon others in an especially acute and vulnerable way. Ricoeur is adamant that self-esteem cannot arise in isolation, apart from others. Self-esteem emerges from a self-reflexive act of self-interpretation. In Ricoeur’s words, ‘self-esteem is the primordial reflexive moment of the aim of the good life’ (OA 188). Self-esteem is rooted not in the self’s recognition of her accomplishments, but rather her *capacities* (OA 181). My self-esteem arises from my evaluation of my self as a capable human being. This self-evaluation is made on the basis of my interpretations of my self’s capacities which, we recall, are particular

²² OA 179. Ricoeur appropriates the term ‘standards of excellence’ from Alasdair MacIntyre (MacIntyre 1981; cf. Ricoeur 1987; OA 176 ff.).

manifestations, on the anthropological plane, of the fundamental capability that is the universal, metaphysical characteristic of human being. The question is, how, by interpreting my own capacities, do I come to the realisation that I am in fact capable? Any answer must appeal to the testimonies of *others*.

It is by an appeal to others as an integral component of self-esteem that Ricoeur's appropriation of Aristotle is rendered concrete. As chapter 2 of this thesis made clear, Ricoeur turns to 'the *mediating* role of others between capacities and realisation' that he finds 'celebrated by Aristotle in his treatise on friendship' (*OA* 181). Recall that Ricoeur also appropriates Aristotle's claim that the *eudaimon* is a person who *needs* friends (*OA* 182; cf. *NE* 1169b4-1170b19). It is, as Ricoeur explains, 'in connection with the notions of capacity and realisation', that is, the self's realisation of her own capacities, 'that a place is made for *lack* and, through the mediation of lack, for *others*' (*OA* 182). Bringing in *lack* here is highly significant. As will become even more clear (below), this 'mediation of lack' constitutes a crucial bridge between the levels of anthropology and morality in Ricoeur's architectonic. A human lack of another reveals a fundamental *need* at the heart of the capable human. This human need can only be answered by solicitude:

To self-esteem, understood as a reflexive moment of the wish for the 'good life', solicitude adds essentially the dimension of *lack*, the fact that we *need* friends; as a reaction to the effect of solicitude on self-esteem, the self perceives itself as another among others. (*OA* 192)

It is the human need for solicitude that leads Ricoeur to a 'moral norm'. Ricoeur realises that self-other relations may not achieve the ideal of solicitude expressed in his

Aristotelian account of friendship. Instead, self-other relations are more often than not characterised by a fundamental dissymmetry between self and other-than-self that risks an instrumentalisation of relations which, at its worst, can culminate in catastrophic violence (cf. *OA* 219-221).²³ To address this risk, Ricoeur insists upon a strong moral norm. He draws on Kantian morality to safeguard against this dissymmetry's propensity to violence. In Ricoeur's own words, the 'passage from solicitude to the norm is of a piece with this basic dissymmetry, to the extent that it is upon this dissymmetry that all the maleficent offshoots of interaction, beginning with influence and culminating in murder, will be grafted' (*OA* 219).

At this point, the roles of Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant are indispensable for properly understanding self-esteem and solicitude in Ricoeur. Ricoeur's most explicit use of Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant threads together his metaphysical concept of capability, his anthropological concept of capacities, and his moral concept of the norm governing self-other relations. Implied in Ricoeur's 'capability' is a combination of Spinoza's *conatus*, Aristotle's *orexis*, and Kant's original innocence (*AV* 74-75).²⁴ But this concept of human capability can only be rendered concrete in a particular self with particular capacities. However, it is now clear that for the self to recognise that she is capable, to attest to her own capacities, and hence to achieve self-esteem, she must also rely on the testimony of *others*.

Ricoeur captures this rather complex conclusion in the following salient discussion:

...if one asks by what right the self is declared to be worthy of esteem, it must be answered that it is not principally by reason of its accomplishments but fundamentally by

²³ As Ricoeur writes elsewhere: 'there is *morality*, in the sense of moral obligation, because there is *violence*' (Ricoeur 1987: 106).

²⁴ cf. Chapter 1, section 3; chapter 2, section 2.2; chapter 3, section 6.1.

reason of its capacities. To understand the term ‘capacity’ correctly, we must return to Merleau-Ponty’s ‘I can’ and extend it from the physical to the ethical level. I am that being who can evaluate his actions and, in assessing the goals of some of them to be good, is capable of evaluating himself and of judging himself to be good...The question is then whether the mediation of the other is not required along the route from capacity to realisation. (OA 181).

In the later Ricoeur, the ‘mediation of the other’ becomes even more clear as ‘capability’, ‘self-esteem’ and ‘solicitude’ are translated into the more neo-Kantian and Spinozist terms of ‘power’, ‘self-affirmation’, and ‘other-approbation’. To see this, consider the following quote from ‘Autonomy and Vulnerability’, which expresses acutely the relation between these three terms:

This connection between power and affirmation needs to be emphasized. It governs all the reflexive forms by which a subject can designate him- or herself as the one who can. But this simple, direct affirmation of a power to act already presents a noteworthy epistemological feature that cannot be proven, demonstrated, but can only be *attested*. This is indicative of a kind of belief that unlike the Platonic *doxa* is not some inferior form of *episteme*...this is...a practical conviction...*a confidence in one’s own capacity, which can be confirmed only through being exercised and through the approbation others grant to it*...Attestation/sanction thus upholds the ability to act in language. Its contrary is not doubt but suspicion – or doubt as suspicion. And we overcome such suspicion only by a leap, a *sursum*, that *other people may encourage, accompany, assist by having confidence in us*...So let us take this connection between affirmation and ability to act as something to build on. (Ricoeur 2007a: 75. Emphasis added)

For Ricoeur, then, the self's 'power to act' can only be exercised if it is affirmed by that self. However, such self-affirmation is only possible if the self's power to act has first been recognised in 'the approbation others grant to it'. Power, self-affirmation and other-approbation come together in a reflexive self who is constitutively bound to the other-than-self.

3. Ricoeur's post-Hegelian Kantian Hermeneutics

3.1 Hermeneutics and Metaphysics

The previous section unpacked Ricoeur's tripartite hermeneutics of selfhood. In the present section, it is crucial to return to reflexive autonomy via the reflection and analysis of this hermeneutics. Reflection and analysis are essential hermeneutic tools. Reflection upon the self and its relations to the other-than-self has a highly complex and distinctive form of self-reflexivity. In turn, self-reflexivity will then lead us back to an analysis of reflexive autonomy, that is, to the hermeneutics and metaphysics of Ricoeur's post-Hegelian Kantian philosophy.

As explained in the introduction to this chapter, self-reflexivity describes the movement of the subject toward an encounter with the various signs, symbols, actions, narratives, and institutions that express its desire to be and effort to exist, and the same subject's turning back in upon itself enriched by this encounter. Self-reflexivity is thus intimately bound up with *reflection*: the self's encounter with the various expressions of its desire to be and effort to exist is at the same time a concrete reflection upon itself, upon its own possibility, and thus a genuine attempt to achieve self-awareness. As Anderson writes: 'a reflexive conception of humanity is constituted by concrete reflection. The reflexive process

can now be understood as the continual attempt to recognize the symbols that give rise to genuine human understanding' (Anderson 1993: 38; cf. Klemm 1983).

The necessary detour via symbols in the search for self-awareness supports Ricoeur's aforementioned rejection of Cartesianism, as well as his broader critique of Husserlian phenomenology. Prior to Ricoeur's initial adoption of hermeneutics as an interpretative strategy in the 1960s, his writings betray a broadly phenomenological approach (evident especially in *Freedom and Nature*). However, he stops short of fully embracing Husserl's eidetic method, the purported 'bracketing' of *all* presuppositions in an attempt to discover things 'as they really are'.²⁵ For while Ricoeur is attracted to the resources in phenomenology which enable us to question our subjective experiences, he ultimately rejects the early Husserl's²⁶ idealism on the basis that it is driven by the impossible methodological goal of escaping the everyday lifeworld from which we always begin. So while Ricoeur does not reject phenomenology outright (for it still constitutes a useful descriptive approach to things as they appear to consciousness), he does reject any claim that we can prove conclusively that such an approach provides an exhaustive account of lived experience. For Ricoeur insists that there is always more to lived experience than any single theory can capture, even while any such theory always presupposes the surplus of available meaning and the encompassing reality it refers to in attempting to make sense of our lived experience (Ricoeur 1981; cf. Pellauer 2007: 64-65). It is for this reason that Ricoeur turns to

²⁵ Ricoeur contends that this method is self-defeating, since Husserl's entire project is itself grounded on one major presupposition, of which it never rids itself, namely, the subject-object model. Husserl's alleged bracketing of all presuppositions, Ricoeur claims, merely amounts to establishing a subject-object model wherein everything depends on the subject pole. What Husserl claims to discover is a method which is able to take philosophy to a transcendental field where things appear to a transcendental subject and where they can be known as what they really are. But Ricoeur argues further that this transcendental subject is in fact no one, because it is simply *any* one as pure knower. Worse, Husserl's method provides no means of *returning* to the world of ordinary lived experience and lived subjectivity.

²⁶ The idealism of the early Husserl is to be distinguished from the reflections found in Husserl's later writings, where he introduces the concept of the 'lifeworld' (*Lebenswelt*) as the dynamic horizon or 'ground' of all shared human experience (Husserl 1970: 142).

hermeneutic philosophy. He explains the corrective role of hermeneutics in the following section of *Freud and Philosophy*:

...[hermeneutic] reflection is not intuition; or, in positive terms, [hermeneutic] reflection is the effort to recapture the Ego of the Ego Cogito in the mirror of its objects, its works, its acts. But why must the positing of the Ego be recaptured through its acts? Precisely because it is given neither in a psychological evidence, nor in an intellectual intuition, nor in a mystical vision. A reflective philosophy is a contrary of a philosophy of the immediate. The first truth – *I am, I think* – remains as abstract and empty as it is invincible; it has to be ‘mediated’ by the ideas, actions, works, institutions, and monuments that objectify it. It is in these objects, in the widest sense of the word, that the Ego must lose and find itself. We can say, in a somewhat paradoxical sense, that a philosophy of reflection is not a philosophy of consciousness, if by consciousness we mean immediate self-consciousness. *Consciousness...is a task, but it is a task because it is not a given.* (FP 43-44).

The claim that consciousness is a task because it is not a given is of considerable importance for our reading of Ricoeur’s metaphysics. For if we adopt Ricoeur’s hermeneutic method when considering his metaphysics, we recognise that metaphysics can never be reduced to transparent, Cartesian deduction. Instead, we need to move beyond the *cogito*, to *interpretation*. Metaphysics, understood in the most generic terms as ‘making sense of things’²⁷, must go beyond direct analysis to incorporate symbols, narratives, actions and institutions, which are expressions of human experiences that evade direct explanation and analysis. Accordingly, any metaphysics must attend to, and build upon, an interpretation of these expressions. For since it is only through human expressions that we can discern anything

²⁷ For an extended discussion of metaphysics in these terms, see Moore 2011. See also Moore 2003.

about human experience (including the human's experience of her own capacities to speak and act in the world), it is only by *interpreting* these expressions that we can begin to make sense of human capacities and, by extension, the fundamental human capability of which human capacities are particular manifestations and expressions. Much like phenomenology, then, metaphysics too must proceed by way of hermeneutics.

In this respect, Ricoeur's appropriation of Spinoza to explore the metaphysical ground of human capability emerges as hermeneutic through and through. To repeat Ricoeur's comments from chapter 1:

The ultimate purpose of hermeneutic reflection and attestation, as I see it, is to try to retrace the line of intentional capacity and action behind mere objects (which we tend to focus on exclusively in our natural attitude) so that we may recover the hidden truth of our operative acts, of *being capable*, of being *un homme capable*. So if hermeneutics is right, in the wake of Kant and Gadamer, to stress the finitude and limits of consciousness, it is also wise to remind ourselves of the tacit potencies and acts of our lived existence (Ricoeur 2004a: 167).

Hermeneutics thus emerges as the necessary reflective discipline for reconciling Ricoeur's metaphysical conviction that to be human is to be capable, with the lived human experiences which threaten to undermine that conviction. For the claim that fundamental capability represents the 'hidden truth of our operative acts' runs counter to the everyday experiences which more often than not suggest something broken at the heart of human willing and acting. *Evil*, whether done or suffered, pervades our lives to such a degree that any claims concerning the ontological primacy of human *capability* – rather than fallibility – must come under serious scrutiny.

In *The Symbolism of Evil*, Ricoeur begins his long hermeneutical detour, teasing out the signs and symbols that appear in texts which narrate accounts of the origin and end of evil. In doing so, he attempts to make sense of the expressions of astonishment at evil experienced successively as the stain of an infecting agent, as awareness of a broken relationship, and, finally, as one's personal *responsibility*. These successive primary expressions refer to the experiences of 'defilement', 'sin', and 'guilt', as named by Ricoeur (*SE* 3-157). The cycle of symbols and myths of evil objectify the multileveled 'experience of being oneself but alienated from oneself' (*SE* 8). In Ricoeur's own words, 'consciousness of self seems to constitute itself at its lowest level by means of symbolism and to work out an abstract language only subsequently, by means of a spontaneous hermeneutics of its primary symbols' (*SE* 9; cf. Klemm 2002). Hermeneutics thus arises in response to confessions of evil. Like Kant, Ricoeur finds that the writers of Genesis *describe*, with primordial signs, the obscure and obsessive traits of the human experience of evil which, like a stain, cannot be removed by – or reduced to – a direct, explanatory account.²⁸ Instead, evil here, as with Kant, has a metaphysical dimension.

At the same time, it is through the avowal of evil, and the accompanying repentance of one's morally evil actions, that Ricoeur follows Kant in tracing a primordial goodness *anterior* to the emergence of evil. For Ricoeur, it is 'always "*through*" the fallen that the primordial shines through' (*FM* 144). It is in this avowal of evil and, crucially, of repentance, that Ricoeur finds recourse for Kant's 'hope for a return to the good'. Ricoeur's hermeneutic engagement with the symbolism of evil thus leads directly to the primordial goodness of the fundamentally capable human being.

²⁸ cf. Ricoeur's discussion of Kant's reading of the Genesis story in chapter 3, section 4.2.

3.2 Ricoeur's post-Hegelian Return to Kant

Ricoeur's metaphysical and moral engagement with the symbolism of evil discloses a further presupposition concerning the *limited* nature of human freedom. Ricoeur echoes Kant's meditation on the inscrutable nature of radical evil's origin in the human will in his hermeneutic engagement with symbolic expressions of the 'servile will': the experience of a free will that is nevertheless bound in captivity (*SE* 151-57). For Ricoeur, capability, as a metaphysical quality of human being, will always be manifested in particular anthropological capacities which belong to embodied humans, bound by the necessary limitations that come with embodiment, and with finite human reason. Consequently, he is quick to spell out the dangers inherent in any philosophy that aims to transcend those all too human limits.

For this reason, while Ricoeur appropriates Hegel, he stops short of fully accepting the latter's system of absolute knowledge. Ricoeur's reflexive philosophy clearly bears the marks of Hegelian dialectics. That is to say, Ricoeur's reflexive model of the self's movement outside of itself, and its consequent return, mirrors the Hegelian dialectic of thesis – antithesis – synthesis. Where Ricoeur departs from Hegel is in his refusal to accept that this dialectic can ever be fully completed. Instead, Ricoeur remains with Kant in advocating what might be described as a broken dialectic, wherein the self confronts various aporia that cannot be resolved by speculative reason alone. In other words, Ricoeur cannot accept a system of absolute knowledge. Although the human subject is capable, for Ricoeur she will always fall short of a march toward the triumph of reason, sublating or swallowing and transcending contradictions (or Kantian aporia) into an all-encompassing, all-knowing system.

Ricoeur's critique of Hegel hinges on his own analysis of the field of human action to which he assigns two dimensions: fulfilled achievement and unfulfilled claim. Fulfilled

achievement emerges where rationality and reality meet; where the rational, so to speak, is real. Examples of this include the contractual law of exchange, penal law, and the conquest of civil rights. An historical account of the emergence of these examples is clearly compatible with the Hegelian dialectic, understood as the successful absorption of negation or conflict into mediation.²⁹

The Hegelian dialectic confronts an aporia, however, at the site of the unfulfilled claim. This emerges in the great many instances of irrationality that are characteristic of a significant part of lived experience. Contrary to the Hegelian claim, experience teaches us that human action is in fact best characterised by ‘islands of rationality, surrounded by irrationality’ (Ricoeur 1995b: 210).³⁰ This experience prompts Ricoeur to ask whether Hegelian philosophy might not be ‘a kind of extrapolation based on the limited experience of the fulfilled achievements of humankind’ (Ricoeur 1995b: 210). For we have an important reason, he argues, to think that a horizon of unfulfilled claims belongs to the most genuine experience of action – and that reason lies in our experience of *evil*. For it is evil that we find affecting the very *origin* of action, leading us to the realisation that ‘there is something broken in the very heart of human action that prevents our partial experience of fulfilled achievements from being equated with the whole field of human action’ (Ricoeur 1995b: 211).

Ricoeur’s encounter with Hegel returns him to Kant, in whom he finds the possibility for an attestation³¹ of a fundamental human capability situated within limited human freedom. Just as Hegel’s philosophy of absolute knowledge represents, for Ricoeur, ‘the contrary to a philosophy of hope’, Kant’s critical philosophy represents the definitive

²⁹ See Hegel 1977. See also Taylor 1975: 76-124 on Hegel’s ‘absolute idealism’.

³⁰ Ricoeur’s claim is of course a deliberate reference to the ‘island’ of secure knowledge in Kant’s first *Critique* (C1 A235-6/B294-5).

³¹ See section 2.3 for earlier references in this chapter to ‘attestation’.

philosophy of hope. The choice between Hegel and Kant is a choice between the illusion of absolute knowledge (a dangerous temptation) and hope as attestation. Or as Ricoeur puts it: 'Between hope and absolute knowledge we have to choose. We cannot have both' (Ricoeur 1995b: 212).

The genius of Kant is to anticipate the Hegelian temptation by confronting a philosophy of hope with the transcendental illusion which replaces Hegel's absolute knowledge. Recall that, for Kant, human *knowledge* is strictly limited to the phenomenal world of objects *as we experience them*. We cannot have knowledge of things-in-themselves, independent of our perspectival experience of them. Furthermore, we cannot ever have knowledge, strictly speaking, of that which is not contained within the boundaries of space and time, including Kant's three postulates of pure practical reason: God, freedom, and immortality. Hope thus emerges for Kant at the place where the Hegelian deceives himself into believing that he can claim knowledge of these practical postulates as if we have absolute knowledge. Ricoeur therefore returns from Hegel to Kant, finding a Kantian hope in a hermeneutics of ethical life that carries attestation as its proper method of truth.

3.3 Ricoeur's Hermeneutics: post-Hegelian or post-Kantian?

Ricoeur's post-Hegelian Kantianism is far from straightforward, however. A tension runs through his writings on Kant, where Ricoeur's oft-acknowledged debt to Kant rests uneasily alongside a critical wariness of Kantian formalism. As has been established, Ricoeur sides with Kant, over Hegel, by insisting that the boundaries of human cognition remain fixed and unsurpassable. Ricoeur also sides with Kant's critical philosophy in opposing the transparency of the Cartesian ego. Ricoeur agrees with Kant that 'an apperception of the

Ego may accompany all my representations, but this apperception is not knowledge of oneself, because 'reflection is not intuition', and *interpretation* is required in achieving any genuine self-awareness (*FP* 44). However, these Kantian commitments are tempered by Ricoeur's critical discussion of the formalism of Kantian autonomy in *Oneself as Another*.³² And Ricoeur's reflections elsewhere suggest that this criticism of Kantian autonomy is underlined by a more fundamental objection to Kant. In *Freud and Philosophy*, Ricoeur criticises what he sees as the overwhelmingly epistemological focus of Kant's theoretical philosophy which, he insists, ultimately shapes the formalism of Kant's practical philosophy. Ricoeur argues that:

The basic limitation of a critical philosophy lies in its exclusive concern for epistemology; reflection is reduced to a single dimension; the only canonical operations of thought are those that ground the 'objectivity' of our representations. This priority given to epistemology explains why in Kant, in spite of appearances, the practical philosophy is subordinated to the critical philosophy: the second critique, that of practical reason, in fact borrows all of its structures from the first, that of pure reason. A single question rules the critical philosophy: What is a priori and what is merely empirical in knowledge? This distinction is the key to the theory of objectivity; it is purely and simply transposed into the second critique; the objectivity of the maxims of the will rests on the distinction between the validity of duty, which is a priori, and the content of empirical desires. (*FP* 44-45)

So while, on the one hand, Ricoeur returns to (the critical boundaries established by) Kant's philosophy, he claims, on the other hand, to move 'away from Kant' along the path

³² See *OA* 204-218, 262-283.

charted by those post-Kantian philosophers who resist ‘this reduction of reflection [as opposed to transparent Cartesian intuition] to a simple critique’ (44). Citing Fichte and, in particular, Jean Nabert, Ricoeur asserts that ‘reflection is not so much a justification of science and duty as a *reappropriation of our effort to exist*’ (45. Emphasis added). In other words, Ricoeur is frustrated by what he sees as the limitations of Kant’s preoccupation with epistemology. Kant’s entire project (both critical and practical), argues Ricoeur, can be understood as driven by, and ultimately reducible to, epistemological concerns.³³ However Ricoeur maintains that epistemology is only one part of the broader task of what he calls reflection. What is needed is to move beyond strictly epistemological concerns in order ‘to recover the act of existing, the positing of the self, in all the density of its works’ (45).

Ricoeur continues that to move beyond what he insists are the Kantian constraints of strictly epistemological concerns is to open up the ‘ethical’ dimension of reflection. In this respect, Ricoeur’s move beyond Kant’s epistemological concerns is at the same time a (post-Kantian) return to the ‘ethical’ of Spinoza. For with Spinoza (and Aristotle), Ricoeur can claim that it is the ethical aim of the good life which constitutes the foundation of philosophical reflection. Kant, read as having a narrow epistemological focus, and a strictly formal morality³⁴, constitutes a necessary but insufficient critical dimension of Ricoeur’s architectonic of moral religion. Kantian morality enters the architectonic in order to regulate the ethical aim already implicit in Spinoza’s metaphysics and Aristotle’s anthropology:

³³ For various reasons that will become clear, and which have already been partly addressed in chapter 3, this is obviously a highly contentious claim about the aims of Kant’s philosophical project. In the past twenty years, there have emerged a number of studies of Kant’s critical philosophy, in particular, which argue persuasively that the Kantian project is driven by deeper social, political and even religious concerns. Contrary to Ricoeur’s assertion, these studies argue that the epistemological elements of the critical philosophy can be read as assisting, and thus reducible to, Kant’s deeper political agenda. See, for example, O’Neill 1989: 3-50 and Neiman 1994.

³⁴ Again, and as section 4 discusses, Kant scholarship has moved beyond this narrow depiction of Kant, which is today almost seen as a caricature of the particularly narrow, formalist readings of the *Groundwork* which dominated Anglo-American ethical theory until at least the late 1980s.

Philosophy is ethics, but ethics is not simply morality. If we follow Spinoza's use of the word 'ethical' we must say that reflection is ethical before becoming a critique of morality. Its goal is to grasp the Ego in its effort to exist, in its desire to be. This is where a reflective philosophy recovers and perhaps also saves the Platonic notion that the source of knowledge is itself *Eros*, desire, love, along with the Spinozistic notion that it is *conatus*, effort. Such effort is a desire, since it is never satisfied; but the desire is an effort since it is the affirmative positing of a singular being and not simply a lack of being. Effort and desire are the two sides of this positing of the self in the first truth: *I am.* (FP 45-46)

So reflection, for Ricoeur, cannot give strict priority to the epistemology of Kant's first *Critique*. Instead, Ricoeur turns to Spinoza, especially as found in Nabert³⁵, as the key figure in revealing the ultimately *hermeneutic* function of reflection as: '*the appropriation of our effort to exist and of our desire to be, through the works which bear witness to that effort and desire*' (FP 46). Self-reflection, in other words, leads to hermeneutics, 'because I cannot grasp the act of existing except in signs scattered in the world' (46).

How does one reconcile the critique of Kant implicit in this appropriation of Spinoza with Ricoeur's claim to be a post-Hegelian *Kantian* philosopher? The answer depends on what we take to be Ricoeur's intention with this self-description. On the one hand, as the previous subsection established, Ricoeur's post-Hegelian Kantianism accurately describes the way in which his appropriation of Hegel's method of reflexive philosophy is accompanied by a refusal to accept the Hegelian pursuit of absolute knowledge, instead returning to the limits of cognition established by Kant. On the other hand, however, such a description is insufficient, for it fails to appreciate the significance of the *post*-Hegelian element of

³⁵ For Ricoeur's debt to Nabert, and Spinozist themes implicit in Nabert, see *FM* xlvi-xlix.

Ricoeur's philosophy. In returning to Kant *after* Hegel, Ricoeur reads Kant with a sensitivity to what post-Kantian philosophers, including Hegel, perceive as weaknesses in the Kantian system, including the excessively formal nature of Kant's critical philosophy. So in this respect, it could be argued that Ricoeur's post-Hegelian Kantianism implies an appropriation of Kant after Hegel that will attempt to modify Kant in light of Hegel and his successors, while remaining wary of the dangers that would come with fully embracing Hegel's idealism. Hence Ricoeur returns to, and modifies, Kant, rather than simply embracing Hegel. Granted, Ricoeur's criticism of Kant could well be labelled *post-Kantian*, insofar as it is influenced by critiques that come *after* Kant, and post-Hegelian, insofar as it is influenced – to a degree – by Hegel and his successors. However, this criticism does not amount to a wholesale rejection of Kant. As the previous section, and the previous chapter, made clear, Ricoeur's Kantian commitments remain, not least in his adoption of a tripartite structure for his architectonic (itself a Kantian term) of moral religion, his attestation to a fundamental human capability, and his development of a Kantian moral norm with which to combat the human propensity to violence and evil. Nevertheless, reading Spinoza and Aristotle *after* Hegel, and therefore in light of post-Hegelian critiques of Kant, enables Ricoeur to retain a critical distance from Kant while still appropriating key Kantian concepts, which he will attempt to modify accordingly in light of his readings of Spinoza and Aristotle. This is the case with the Kantian concept at the heart of Ricoeur's architectonic of moral religion – *autonomy*.

4. Autonomy and the Reflexive Self

4.1 Ricoeur's autonomous agent

In 'Autonomy and Vulnerability', Ricoeur makes the bold, seemingly counterintuitive claim that 'the *autonomy* in question is that of a *fragile, vulnerable* being' (AV 73. Emphasis added). If autonomy is generally understood as rational self-determination, or the extent to which 'individuals are authors of their own lives' (Anderson 2003: 150)³⁶, then, Ricoeur seems to argue, the capacity of these individuals to author their own lives is always-already determined by both the fragility and the vulnerability of autonomous agency. Ricoeur therefore rejects the philosophical accounts, based on extremely formal readings of Kant, of the autonomous agent as a wholly independent, atomistic, self-legislating actor, which were prominent in Anglo-American ethics when he first began writing on autonomy in the 1980s.³⁷ Instead, Ricoeur anticipates more recent Kantians such as Christine Korsgaard who build on Kant's own recognition of our contingencies to develop accounts of autonomous agency that accommodate human fragility and vulnerability.³⁸

³⁶ Although Anderson notes that despite the privileged place held by autonomy in modern moral philosophy, there is little agreement in the philosophical literature when it actually comes to defining autonomy. That is to say, while figures from Kant and Mill to Isaiah Berlin, John Rawls and even Ricoeur himself all share the conviction that autonomy ought to play a central role in the assessment of political institutions, their actual accounts of autonomy, including its definition, are diverse and often contradictory. See Anderson 2003: 150ff.

³⁷ Ricoeur's hostility to the overly formalist Kant who he criticises heavily in the 8th study of *Oneself as Another* is therefore likely to be targeted not at Kant himself, who, as chapter 3 argued, is in fact far less formal than Ricoeur's criticisms suggest, but rather the extreme formalism of Anglo-American ethical and political theory which was so prominent in the 1980s (when Ricoeur was working on his Gifford Lectures and the subsequent text of *Oneself as Another*), and which was based on extremely formal readings of Kant's *Groundwork* (cf. notes 33 and 34, above).

³⁸ See Korsgaard 2009, in which she ties the function of a human action to the constitution of the agency and therefore the identity of the person who does it. Even more recently, Derek Parfit has offered a subtle re-reading of Kant's ethics that grounds his own novel synthesis of Kantian, contractualist and consequentialist ethical theories (Parfit 2011). Of course, these recent developments in ethical theory raise the question as to whether Ricoeur's attacks on the formalism of 1980s Anglo-American ethical theory now appear dated. This is arguably a significant problem that must be considered when reading *Oneself as Another* which, of course, was written during this period. However, as I shall argue below, this is not necessarily the case with Ricoeur's later writings on autonomy, including 'Autonomy and Vulnerability', which can be interpreted as offering an extremely subtle, constructive account of autonomous agency which appropriates Spinozist, Aristotelian and

As the above quote suggests, autonomy exists alongside fragility and vulnerability in a threefold relation, informed by the different aspects of the architectonic, which structures Ricoeur's understanding of human agency. With Kant, Ricoeur places autonomy at the *core* of the agent. With Aristotle, he asserts that the *form* of autonomy is fragile; that is, perpetually exposed to external factors beyond the agent's control. Finally, with Spinoza, Ricoeur asserts that the *content* of autonomy is vulnerable. The content of autonomy is that which increases or decreases due to the actions or reactions of agents. Agents are constantly striving to increase in power while embedded alongside each other. The potential increase or decrease in power upon an encounter with another renders the autonomous agent vulnerable.

Let us now unpack these three aspects of autonomous agency in turn. Ricoeur places autonomy as the core of the agent as a rational being. If autonomy is understood as rational self-determination, then our fundamentally rational nature renders us all fundamentally autonomous. While Ricoeur concedes that selfhood (*ipseity*) can only fully be grasped in its relation to other-than-self (as oneself inasmuch as other), Ricoeur remains Kantian by holding on to this sense of the agent as fundamentally autonomous. Ricoeur distances himself from the tendency in continental philosophy toward de-centering the agent, as most famously found in Emmanuel Lévinas's emphasis on the primacy of the Other. Ricoeur finds Lévinas problematic not only because he undermines the autonomy of the self, but because, in doing so, he jeopardises any hope for a genuine engagement between self and other that is not marked by dissymmetry and absolute distance.³⁹

Kantian ideas to produce a structure thoroughly informed by the architectonic attributed to Ricoeur in this thesis.

³⁹ See *OA* 188-189; 335-341. Cf. Lévinas 1969.

The form of Ricoeur's autonomous agency is informed by his Aristotelian understanding of the fragility of a good human life.⁴⁰ While autonomy as an *ideal* may aim at complete self-determination, or the capacity to be the sole author of one's own life, lived experience dictates that we *never* have a complete grasp of our lives.⁴¹ There is, instead, a structural gap between autonomy as an ideal and autonomy as lived. We are never completely autonomous and, to the extent that we lack autonomy, we are fragile to things in the world we do not control. This is the very form of our autonomy as 'fragile' beings (cf. *AV* 73).⁴²

If, as interpreted here, the *form* of Ricoeur's autonomy is fragile, then its *content* is vulnerable. This vulnerability recalls the interdependence of self and other which characterises Ricoeur's hermeneutics of selfhood. Autonomy is vulnerable (i.e. the agent's power increases or decreases) insofar as selfhood (*ipseity*) implies otherness 'to so intimate a degree that the one cannot be thought without the other' (*OA* 3). To be a vulnerable-autonomous self is to be embedded with and among others. The autonomous agent depends upon others with and among whom she is embedded and, to the same degree, others are dependent upon her. Recall that Ricoeur appropriates from Spinoza the idea that an individual's activity represents an increase in power which manifests itself in feelings of joy, while an individual's passivity represents a loss of power which manifests itself in suffering. The constitutional interdependence of autonomous agents is therefore characterised by mutual vulnerability. These relationships always have a degree of passivity that risks

⁴⁰ cf. chapter 2, section 3.2.

⁴¹ One might go further and even question the viability of complete autonomy as an ideal. For if complete autonomy means dispensing with everything that makes us fragile, from self-other relations to countless other sources of value, is it really that desirable? Or would a life of complete autonomy be so completely alien to what we recognise as a human life that we could hardly call it a human life at all?

⁴² This adds further support to Ricoeur's critique of Lévinas. Ricoeur would argue that it is precisely because the self is fragile that you can't completely subordinate the self in favour of the Other.

manifesting in a sharp dissymmetry: the two participants assume the respective roles of agent and patient, and the former exercises power over the latter. As stated above (2.4), it is for this reason that Ricoeur insists upon a strong moral norm to govern self-other relations, in order to safeguard against this dissymmetry's propensity to violence.

4.2 Reflexive Autonomy

The *reflexive* nature of Ricoeur's account of selfhood – that is, oneself inasmuch as other – lends autonomy both its fragile form and its vulnerable content. Autonomy's fragility stems from the agent's structural openness to factors beyond her control; autonomy's vulnerability stems from the potential increase or decrease in power to which the agent-as-embedded is perpetually exposed.

The fragile form and vulnerable content of Ricoeur's reflexive autonomy was already implicit in the threefold relation posited above (2.4) between power, self-affirmation, and other-approbation. In order for capacities to be exercised, including the capacity for self-determination or autonomous action, an agent must have confidence to affirm her power to exercise those capacities. It is clear now that this confidence is vulnerable to (mis)approbation. Loss of confidence is tantamount to a decrease in power, as Ricoeur explains:

The confidence I place in my power to act is part of this power. To believe that I can is already to be capable...To believe oneself unable to speak is to be linguistically disabled, to be excommunicated, so to speak. And it is just this dreadful handicap – of an incapacity redoubled by a fundamental doubt concerning one's ability to speak, and even tripled by a

lack of approbation, sanction, confidence, and aid accorded by others to speak for oneself
– that you...are confronted with. (*AV* 76-77).

It is for this reason that Ricoeur appropriates a strong moral norm in his ‘little ethics’ to neutralise and regulate this dissymmetry between agents and patients. For while ‘the autonomy in question is that of a fragile, vulnerable being’, that autonomy is also potentially dangerous, if left unchecked, since it could potentially be wielded by an agent as power over a passive recipient in what risks manifesting itself as an act of violence.⁴³ It is such violence that Ricoeur seeks to prevent by stressing the moral norm at the heart of ethical life.

5. Reflexive Autonomy and Ethical Life

5.1 Reflexive Autonomy in the ‘Little Ethics’

Ricoeur divides his ‘little ethics’ into three separate ‘studies’ in *Oneself as Another*. These ‘studies’ address: ‘The Self and the Ethical Aim’ (‘Seventh Study’, *OA* 169-202); ‘The Self and the Moral Norm’ (‘Eighth Study’, *OA* 203-239); and ‘The Self and Practical Wisdom’ (‘Ninth Study’, *OA* 240-296).

The human desire to be and effort to exist are aimed at the good life. Ricoeur’s ethical aim is an Aristotelian *telos*, i.e., the good life (cf. *OA* 172). However, Ricoeur is adamant that ethics, as a way of life, requires a moral norm to regulate its *telos*, which can become distorted under conditions of actual evil and violence. The reflexive nature of autonomy requires the moral norm in order to safeguard against the dissymmetry between

⁴³ cf. *OA* 220.

agent and patient, which risks violence and various other manifestations of the human propensity to evil (OA 220).

Although the reflexive nature of autonomy means that the moral norm is necessary, it is not sufficient in itself to govern ethical life. Autonomy is shaped by the fragility and vulnerability of the autonomous agent. As fragile, vulnerable creatures, we run up against aporia in concrete ethical cases and in the demands of those others with and among whom we are embedded as reflexively autonomous agents. This is why the ‘little ethics’ culminates in what Ricoeur calls a “critical” *phronesis*’ (OA 290-91). This is a form of practical wisdom that mediates the Aristotelian aim of the good life and the Kantian demand of the moral norm. The *phronimos*, or practically wise person, relates the morally regulated means of virtue to the practical decision at hand.⁴⁴

In turning from the moral norm to *phronesis*, Ricoeur is emphatically not claiming to transcend or dispense with the moral norm. On the contrary, he is adamant that the moral norm remains an indispensable component of ethical life. If ethical life is characterised as ‘aiming at the good life, with and for others, in just institutions’ (OA 172), then it must assume the features of a moral norm. This is confirmed when Ricoeur refers to the ‘little ethics’ in his final collection of ethical and political writings, *Reflections on The Just* (Ricoeur 2007a, 2007b, 2007c). The connection between ethics and life becomes explicit as Ricoeur ties ethics to anthropological capacities and to the metaphysical concept of capability:

I did not see at that time [of writing *Oneself as Another*] the strength of the connection that links this ethics to the main themes of that book [*Oneself as Another*], that is, the exploring

⁴⁴ cf. Ricoeur 2007b.

of the capacities and incapacities that make a human being a capable, acting and suffering, being. (Ricoeur 2007c: 2).

The above admission is significant in supporting the argument of this chapter. First, Ricoeur explicitly connects his ethics both to what I have called the anthropological capacities and to a metaphysical capability; in turn, this connection lies at the heart of his reflexive autonomy. One consequence of this connection is that *all* human capacities must be understood reflexively. If to be human is to possess a fragile, vulnerable autonomy, then that fragility and vulnerability will extend to all human capacities. The strength of this connection between ethics and human capacities cannot be understated. For what is ethics, if not a response to the twin vulnerabilities and possibilities inherent in those capacities?

Second, Ricoeur strengthens the connection between his ethics and his anthropology by adopting a regulative framework – that is, the moral norm serves as a regulative ideal. The vulnerability of capacities is exacerbated by the dissymmetry that perpetually threatens to destabilise self-other relations, which the moral norm attempts to regulate.

5.2 Reflexive Autonomy in the Later Ricoeur

Reflexive autonomy explains why the later Ricoeur turns increasingly to Spinoza and Aristotle in developing his architectonic of moral religion. Yet crucially, it also explains why, despite the increasing presence of Spinoza and Aristotle in his later thought, his *ethical* outlook remains resolutely Kantian.

Consider the transition in subject matter from *Oneself as Another* to Ricoeur's final essays and interviews, which can be mapped across three distinct stages. First, Ricoeur's hermeneutics of selfhood appears in *Oneself as Another*, especially in the 'little ethics'. Second,

Ricoeur's concrete reflection on ethical life appears in *Reflections on The Just*. Third, Ricoeur's meditation on the metaphysical ground of human capacities appears in his final essays and interviews (Ricoeur 2000a, 2002, 2004a).

Of these three, it is the third stage that is most likely to puzzle the reader. How can it be claimed that Ricoeur remains Kantian when his subject matter is characterised by the increasing influence of Spinoza and Aristotle, and the seemingly diminishing influence of Kant? A critical answer lies in Ricoeur's ever-present awareness of radical evil. In 'Ethics and Human Capability' and *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Ricoeur discusses Kant's *Religion*, retaining the Kantian insight which characterised earlier works including *Fallible Man* and *The Symbolism of Evil*, that despite our fundamental capability or goodness, human freedom carries with it a radically inscrutable propensity to evil (Ricoeur 2002, *MHF*; cf. *FM*, *SE*). So while the language and emphasis of the later Ricoeur may change, as 'capability' replaces 'fallibility' as the focal topic (Ricoeur 2004a: 167-68), Ricoeur preserves a Kantian wariness of the human propensity to evil which is not present in either Spinoza or Aristotle. To the extent that this wariness is preserved, the later Ricoeur remains Kantian.

In addition, the entire reflexive exercise of seeing oneself *as another*, which dominates the later Ricoeur's ethical outlook, is itself Kantian. It clearly echoes the second of Kant's three 'maxims of the common human understanding' at the heart of his third *Critique*, namely, to 'think in the position of everyone else' (*C3* 5:294).⁴⁵ This insight is telling, for it suggests that while the conception of reflexive autonomy constitutes on one level a modification of Kant, at a deeper level, it remains thoroughly Kantian in its aim. Although Ricoeur's reflexive appropriation of Spinoza and Aristotle modifies Kantian autonomy, this same reflexivity leads to an ethical insight that is profoundly Kantian. For by coming to see

⁴⁵ The three maxims are, respectively: '1. To think for oneself; 2. To think in the position of everyone else; 3. Always to think in accord with oneself' (*C3* 5:294).

my autonomy as reflexive, and by coming to see myself as embedded – as vulnerable to others, but also holding a power-over others – I acquire what that most Kantian of political philosophers, Hannah Arendt, referred to as an ‘enlarged mentality’ that enables me to imagine myself in the place of the other (Arendt 1977: 220-221; cf. Kearney 2004: 173).

Reflexive autonomy therefore yields a vision of ethical life in the later Ricoeur that is recognisably Kantian in its response to human vulnerability and the inscrutable propensity to evil. As will be seen in the next section, it is also Kantian in its aim of developing a universal moral religion which binds humans together by virtue of their common rationality. The question that remains to be answered is: how does reflexive autonomy shape and contribute to Ricoeur’s moral religion? It is to this final question that we now turn.

6. Reflexive Autonomy and Moral Religion

6.1 Ethics and Metaphysics

The increasing presence of Spinoza in Ricoeur’s moral religion indicates a reflexive movement in his last writings. On a Spinozist reading, the agent is not simply embedded with and among others; equally, she is embedded in the wider whole of which she and her fellow human beings are all inextricable and irreplaceable components as modes of the one, infinite substance – what is being referred to in this thesis as God, Nature or Life. This dual understanding of a metaphysical embeddedness in Spinoza is apparent in Ricoeur’s distinctive claim, introduced in chapter 1, that ‘our horizontal and eternal dependence with

respect to all things...[is accompanied by] our vertical and immanent dependence with respect to the primordial power that Spinoza continues to name “God” (OA 316).⁴⁶

Ricoeur’s claim also discloses a connection between reflexivity and religion. Reflexivity reveals both our embeddedness with and among other human beings and our embeddedness in the wider whole that we call Life. One Spinozist idea that helps distinguish Ricoeur’s later philosophy as a moral religion is the conviction that fundamental capability, as possibility, forever renders the agent qua capable human part of a dynamic whole. To be human is to participate in this whole of which one is an irreplaceable and inextricable component.

6.2 Reflexive Autonomy and Ricoeur’s Architectonic of Moral Religion

The formative impact of Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant on Ricoeur’s reflexive autonomy is instructive. It echoes to a certain degree the interplay between the metaphysical, anthropological and moral ideas at play in Ricoeur’s architectonic of moral religion. Admittedly, this interplay is and can only be implicit. Ricoeur’s architectonic is informed by Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant at different levels. Nothing demonstrates this more clearly than the increasing prominence of the term ‘life’ in Ricoeur’s later thought as metaphysical, anthropological and moral (OA 315-317; Ricoeur 2000a). Life, not reason, becomes the universal theme that binds humans together on the basis of what they share. Recalling Ricoeur’s words, quoted at the outset of the thesis: ‘It is in my desire to be, in my effort to exist, that I am struck by the arrow of the religious’ (Ricoeur 2000a: 207-208). It is in the very effort of living, in other words, that humans are bound together; hence life’s basis for a moral religion. Ricoeur thus derives from Spinoza’s *conatus* the recognition that the desire to

⁴⁶ cf. Chapter 1, section 3.1, which also addresses the critical questions that might be raised at this claim of Ricoeur’s.

be and effort to exist underlines all human interaction, including the respect we reserve for one another as rational agents. 'Being', writes Ricoeur, 'is...effort before it is representation or idea' (Ricoeur 1974: 31-32; cf. Schweiker 2008: 89). Ricoeur also derives from Aristotle the recognition that this life is vulnerable; that we are bound together not only by the fact that we share life, but also by the fact that what we share is perpetually vulnerable and unstable.

Spinoza and Aristotle thus contribute to a complex and nuanced architectonic of moral religion rooted in a reverence for *life*. Yet it should be clear that the transition from a straightforward Kantian religion of reason to a richer moral religion borne out of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of ethical life is emphatically *not* a departure from Kant's insistence upon universal reason. To stress 'life' instead of 'reason' as the factor that binds human beings together in moral religion is not to abandon reason. Rather, life *includes* reason. What unites Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant is their shared status, in Ricoeur's architectonic, as *rationalist* philosophers. So while the architectonic's emphasis may shift from reason to life, the architectonic remains thoroughly rational, and life should be understood as a broader, inclusive term that encompasses reason. Indeed, human life would not be *human* life without that most human of characteristics, reason. For as the introduction to this thesis stressed, and as we shall again discuss in the conclusion, Ricoeur's architectonic of moral religion represents a rationalist, philosophical alternative to the 'anti-metaphysical Protestant lineage of Karl Barth' (Ricoeur 2004a: 166) that has come to dominate philosophical theology throughout the twentieth and (now) twenty-first centuries. Crucially, Ricoeur's architectonic of moral religion offers a timely framework for a universal religion of reason which is based on a bold reverence for life.

CONCLUSION

TOWARDS A HERMENEUTICS OF ETHICAL LIFE

This thesis has argued that reading the later Ricoeur's philosophy as a moral religion greatly enriches our understanding of his philosophical project as a whole. I have aimed to reconstruct Ricoeur's philosophy as an architectonic of moral religion, shaped by his hermeneutic appropriation of Spinoza's metaphysics, Aristotle's anthropology and Kant's moral philosophy. This concluding chapter intends to stress the ways in which Ricoeur's hermeneutics of ethical life contributes to this bold and distinctive moral religion.

The chapter begins by recapping the central aims and claims of the thesis. This is followed by a critical review of the key features of moral religion. Next, I discuss in turn the hermeneutic nature and the ethical aim of moral religion. Finally, the thesis concludes by stressing the crucial role of Life as the common thread in the architectonic linking Spinoza's metaphysics, Aristotle's anthropology and Kant's moral philosophy.

1. Opening Remarks: The Aims and Claims of the Thesis

In the opening chapter, I introduced the three implicit exegetical, critical and restorative aims which have guided my reconstruction of Ricoeur's project as an architectonic of moral religion.¹ Recapping these interrelated aims will enable me to renew the three explicit claims put forward in the introduction.²

¹ See Introduction, section 1.2.

² See Introduction, section 1.3.

The exegetical aim of the thesis has been to elucidate those aspects of Ricoeur's thought which reflect Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant. I have devoted three chapters to examining the separate dialogues Ricoeur holds with each of these philosophers, isolating key concepts which, I have claimed, inform his hermeneutics of ethical life. In particular, Ricoeur appropriates Spinoza's *conatus* for his metaphysical concept of capability; Aristotle's account of human vulnerability for his anthropology of human capacities; and Kant's categorical imperative for his moral norm governing the human pursuit of the good life.

The restorative aim of the thesis has been to derive a substantial architectonic from this exegesis. I have aimed to demonstrate that this architectonic constitutes the thread that holds Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant together in Ricoeur's thought; this thread lends his project as a whole a remarkable consistency. This restorative aim also informs two of the claims put forward in the introduction, which can now be reiterated retrospectively. The first claim is that Ricoeur's architectonic enables readers to interpret his philosophy as a moral religion; that is, as a framework for thinking and acting in the whole we call Life, aiming toward the joyful recognition of oneself and others as capable beings inextricably bound up in the whole. The second claim is that Ricoeur's architectonic is rendered religious by a reflexive understanding of autonomy, or a reflexivity-conviction, which underpins his hermeneutics of ethical life, and which was elucidated in the previous chapter. This reflexivity-conviction is grounded on the attestation that being oneself inasmuch as other (*soi-même comme un autre*) involves both acting and suffering (*OA* 20-23; cf. Anderson 2002: 18). The result is a reflexive account of the self as inextricably embedded both among others and within the whole. Ricoeur's hermeneutics of ethical life, it has been claimed, elucidates this embeddedness which, in turn, constitutes human being, and the architectonic.³

³ cf. Chapter 4, section 1.

The critical aim of this thesis has been to assess the plausibility of Ricoeur's architectonic of moral religion. The consistency and coherence of Ricoeur's hermeneutical method has been scrutinised in light of his attempt to render compatible Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant's seemingly disparate accounts of ethical life. Questions have also been raised concerning the compatibility of Ricoeur's Kantian commitments with his readings of Spinoza and Aristotle, and the impact of potential disparities here for the overall coherence of his architectonic. These significant questions have helped to bring to light presentational problems which can hinder attempts to make sense of Ricoeur. Ricoeur's writing is very dense, with a propensity to fixate on exegetical minutiae which often tax even the most informed readers. Furthermore, Ricoeur often illustrates his points not by way of example, but instead by reference to historical thinkers, which often risks over-complicating already elaborate arguments. As a result, it is often difficult to discern an overall systematic coherence to his thought. Nevertheless, I have sought to defend Ricoeur against these critical questions by focusing on his reflexive method. I have argued that Ricoeur's reflexivity enables him to move back and forth between Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant, selectively appropriating key concepts from each of these philosophers for an overall architectonic of moral religion. This method is in line with Ricoeur's overall hermeneutic approach, which does not seek a straightforward, literal reading of these philosophers, but instead *interprets* their texts, questioning presuppositions that may have become entrenched in contemporary scholarship and unearthing hitherto unforeseen meanings contained within the texts.⁴ It is for this reason that Ricoeur's Kantian commitments are ultimately rendered compatible with his appropriation of Spinoza and Aristotle, most noticeably in the modified account of

⁴ cf. Chapter 1, section 6.

reflexive autonomy detailed in chapter 4.⁵ I claimed that Ricoeur's reflexive exercise of seeing oneself *as another* is itself Kantian, which suggests that while his conception of reflexive autonomy constitutes on one level a modification of Kant, at a deeper level, it remains thoroughly Kantian in its aim. So while Ricoeur's reflexive appropriation of Spinoza and Aristotle may appear to modify Kantian autonomy, this same reflexivity also leads to an ethical insight that is profoundly Kantian, as expressed in the maxim to 'think in the position of everyone else'.⁶

Answering the above critical questions enables me to reassert the third explicit claim of this thesis: that Ricoeur's architectonic of moral religion offers a bold and timely vision for contemporary philosophy of religion, blending a Kantian conception of an ethical commonwealth with a Spinozist conception of an ethical desire to increase in one's activity as an inextricable and irreplaceable part of the wider whole. Ricoeur's architectonic offers a rationalist vision of capable human beings actively embracing life both among one another and in the whole. It will become apparent that this architectonic provides a valuable alternative to the prevailing trends in philosophy of religion⁷ during the assessment of contemporary literature in the postscript.

⁵ See especially chapter 4, section 4.

⁶ Chapter 4, section 5.2. cf. *C3* 5:294

⁷ All too roughly, and without wishing to mistake the unstable and porous dividing line between 'analytic' and 'continental' philosophy for a concrete distinction, the prevailing trends in analytic philosophy of religion can be characterised by an almost exclusive focus on conceptual analysis, while a great majority of continental philosophers of religion remain in thrall to postmodern critiques of the Enlightenment project. Ricoeur's architectonic, this thesis has argued, eschews both alternatives by, on the one hand, rooting moral religion in concrete ethical life and, on the one hand, by appealing to a distinctly rationalist tradition in the history of western philosophy. For a critical account of analytic philosophy of religion's almost exclusive focus on conceptual analysis, see Carter and Whistler 2011: xi-xxii. For a critical assessment of continental philosophy of religion's preoccupation with the postmodern, see Smith and Whistler (eds.), 2010.

2. The key features of Moral Religion

It has been repeatedly asserted throughout this thesis that moral religion is grounded in what humans share as beings who are given life, develop, come to fullness of life and to the end of life. Ricoeur's reflexive hermeneutics reveals human subjects to be inextricably embedded both with and among others as acting and suffering selves, and within the wider whole of which they are each inextricable and irreplaceable components; this embeddedness is a constitutive aspect of human being. It is on the basis of these shared aspects of lived human experience that moral religion advocates both a Kantian respect for individual lives as rational ends in themselves, and a Spinozist reverence for the whole of which we are all a part.

Retrospectively, it might seem that moral religion, with this emphasis on lived human experience, is closer to either moral psychology or ethical naturalism than to any *hermeneutic* account of ethical life. Ricoeur's ethical aim of the good life, and its relation to the fundamental desire to be and effort to exist that underlie human action, has obvious overlaps with debates in contemporary moral psychology concerning the role of emotions in practical reasoning and moral motivation.⁸ Meanwhile, the very project of grounding moral religion in an *anthropology* of human capacities clearly has affinities with attempts to seek a naturalistic foundation for ethics.⁹ However, moral religion is differentiated from both moral psychology and ethical naturalism by the *three* dimensions of metaphysics, anthropology and morality which the architectonic brings together. Specifically, moral religion, as presented in this thesis, would be incoherent apart from the metaphysical foundation which presents

⁸ On the emotions see, for example, Nussbaum 2001 and Solomon 2003. On practical reasoning and moral motivation see Milgram (ed.) 2001 and Parfit 2011.

⁹ Among recent attempt to seek a naturalistic foundation for ethics, see most famously Foot 2001. For critical discussions of ethical naturalism, see Williams 1985, 2002, 2006.

human striving as inextricably bound up with the whole of which the human is a part. Ricoeur's image of the arrow of the religious representing the human desire for life is crucial here. As capable human subjects, we are predisposed to strive for the joyful recognition of ourselves as part of the whole, and that striving is propelled by the arrow of the religious in our desire to be and effort to exist.¹⁰ One cannot make sense of anthropology or morality within Ricoeur's architectonic of moral religion apart from this particular metaphysical foundation, which Ricoeur expresses with this image of being struck by the arrow of the religious. By contrast, moral psychology and ethical naturalism lack both this particular metaphysical foundation, and the architectonic which holds Spinoza's metaphysics, Aristotle's anthropology, and Kant's moral philosophy together. Ricoeur's appropriation of Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant unveils the three dimensions of life – metaphysical, anthropological and moral – which are shared by all human beings in their however distinctive pursuits of the good. Metaphysically, we are beings who are driven by our desires and efforts to strive for the good. Anthropologically, we are beings whose pursuits of the good are perpetually vulnerable to factors beyond our control. Morally, we are beings whose respective pursuits of the good are best enabled through a shared effort that involves living with and for others in just institutions.

The ultimate objective of moral religion can therefore be characterised as the attainment of the ideal of ethical life, and this ideal is captured in the Ricoeurian maxim of living 'the good life, with and for others, in just institutions' (*OA* 172). However, it should be clear that the pursuit of this ideal is not intended in any way to replace particular religious traditions or doctrines. Rather, as chapter 3 asserted, a healthy society can only flourish if a common moral religion that binds human beings together on the basis of what they share is

¹⁰ cf. Ricoeur 2000a: 207-208ff. cf. also Introduction, section 2.1.

preserved alongside the right of each individual to their own private beliefs and their own independence of thought (chapter 3, section 5.2). As the next section will establish, moral religion will confront religious traditions only to the extent that they fail to consistently scrutinise their presuppositions and promote independent, critical thinking. So if moral religion's ideal of ethical life is described as the good life, with and for others, in just institutions, this ideal should be understood as compatible with a range of religious traditions. In sum, it is possible to pursue a moral religion while still inhabiting a particular religious tradition. In this respect, moral religion should not be equated with the meta-narrative at the heart of John Hick's argument for religious pluralism, for example.¹¹

3. Hermeneutics

3.1 A Critical Method

The hermeneutic method behind Ricoeur's moral religion is characterised by an unyielding critical scrutiny. Concepts that form the core of this thesis, from 'religion' to 'ethics' to 'life', have been subjected to a rigorous process of interpretation, a hermeneutics, in order to discern to the fullest possible extent the meaning behind them. In line with Ricoeur's critique of Cartesianism, hermeneutics requires us to go beyond direct analysis to *interpret* symbols, narratives, actions and institutions, which are expressions of human experiences that evade direct explanation and analysis. Such interpretation therefore demands, as far as possible, what David Jasper refers to as the 'suspension of the prejudices and preconceptions inherent in any *uncritical* "faith"' (Jasper 2004: 111. Emphasis added). Hermeneutics, continues Jasper, 'does not preach; nor do Ricoeur's texts' (111). Instead, one must be free

¹¹ See Hick 1982.

to think independently and critically, unburdened, as far as possible, by the directives of any particular religious tradition, irrespective of one's relation to that tradition.

The critical scrutiny demanded by this hermeneutic approach is well captured in George Pattison's constructive and critical account of the task of 'thinking about God'.¹² Pattison writes:

If there is to be anything like theology at all in our time and in the future, then it cannot be the mere defence or revivification of some ancient paradigm of thought, but a living, thinking attempt to think through and articulate what God (or Christ, or prayer or any other 'theological' topic) could possibly mean for beings living through the new axial age we are currently experiencing...[In this respect, it is important] *to flag the danger of allowing usage and familiarity to conceal assumptions and directives that we may wish to hold open in the face of certain decisive questions?* (Pattison 2005: 9. Emphasis added; cf. Pattison 1996).

Moral religion provides a framework for thinking through, for critically interpreting, that multifaceted, open horizon we experience and refer to as 'life', however life is experienced. But such is the openness and breadth of life as a subject matter that any interpretative framework must itself be suitably malleable. As a framework for thinking and acting in pursuit of the ideal of ethical life, then, moral religion should not be understood as a rigid, prescriptive formula, intended to replace specific religious doctrines or practices. The objective of moral religion is to enable the ethical ideal of the good life, with and for others, in just institutions; it will consequently be prescriptive *only* to the extent that it can best

¹² The critical scrutiny of this hermeneutic approach is also evident in Tracy's argument that a broader term than 'God' is needed for an open, constructive dialogue among the Abrahamic religions (presumably because the term 'God' carries too many presuppositions for those from within different traditions to come to any final agreement concerning its meaning, principal characteristics or attributes, all of which must remain open to question). See Tracy 2009. See also Introduction, section 3.2.

enable that ideal. So, for example, Ricoeur's introduction of a Kantian moral norm to regulate ethical conduct serves only to safeguard against the human propensity to violence which always already threatens to undermine the good life. In this respect, the hermeneutic method and aim behind moral religion should be understood as minimally prescriptive; a framework to guide individual subjects' thinking and acting through life. Again, Pattison's remarks are apt here. As he puts it, 'the point is not to provide an "answer". The point is no more than to open up or to strive to keep open the multidimensionality of discourse' (Pattison 2005: 242). This is precisely what Ricoeur seeks with his architectonic of moral religion as he engages *hermeneutically* with the three dimensions of life: metaphysical, anthropological and moral.

3.2 A Kantian Structure

This thesis has continually asserted that Ricoeur's architectonic of moral religion remains fundamentally Kantian in its spirit, its structure, and its aim, despite the inclusion of Spinoza and Aristotle.¹³ Ricoeur himself has claimed that the critical nature of his hermeneutics is necessarily Kantian. And in the following discussion from 1978, he admits the continuing influence of Kant:

Kant...is without doubt the philosopher who has never ceased to inspire me and to provoke me. I have always recognized in him the philosopher who joins a precise architectonic of the power of thought to an intransigent sense of the limits involved. (Ricoeur 1978b: 8; cf. Anderson 1993: 119).

¹³ cf. Chapter 4, sections 1.2, 5.2.

As chapter 4 established, Ricoeur adopts a Kantian critique to challenge the Hegelian pursuit of absolute knowledge.¹⁴ At the same time, Ricoeur also preserves a positive Kantian conception of autonomy as self-determination (albeit modified by post-Hegelian critiques of the abstract Kantian subject¹⁵) to challenge the postmodern critique which culminates with a decentered subject. Instead, Ricoeur insists upon the possibility of recentered and recentering subjects (*FP* 422, 462 ff.; *TN III* 217ff.).¹⁶ This means a human subject is constituted by and constitutes selfhood (*ipse*) by coming to see herself inasmuch as other (*OA* 3ff., 353; cf. Anderson 1993: 121-122) – a process which echoes the Kantian maxim to ‘think in the position of everyone else’ (*C3* 5:294).¹⁷

The Kantian influence behind Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of ethical life thus leads him to reject the exaltation of the subject in pursuit of absolute knowledge, on the one hand, and the postmodern dissolution of the subject, on the other. Yet it should also be noted that while Ricoeur’s Kantian refusal of postmodernism is ultimately driven by a defence of the autonomous subject, this defence is enabled by a *reflexive* architectonic which modifies Kantian autonomy with Aristotle’s account of human vulnerability and Spinoza’s account of human relationality, resulting in a richer and more concrete account of social relations than what is typically associated with more abstract readings of Kant.¹⁸

Ricoeur’s moral religion is therefore a distinctly modern architectonic for humans as rational yet finite creatures striving to attain the joyful recognition of themselves as part of the whole. For despite his metaphysical conviction in human capability, Ricoeur shares Kant’s wariness of the human propensity to evil. It is for this reason that moral religion

¹⁴ cf. Chapter 4, section 3.2.

¹⁵ cf. Chapter 4, section 3.3.

¹⁶ cf. Chapter 4, sections 2 and 4. cf. also Anderson 1993: 121.

¹⁷ cf. Chapter 4, section 5.2.

¹⁸ cf. Chapter 4, section 4.

assumes a noticeably Kantian thrust with the norm which Ricoeur employs to regulate the human pursuit of the good life with and for others. This moral norm (e.g. Kant's categorical imperative) enables us to regulate our conduct among others since, as Kant recognised, we are finitely rational creatures who can be aware of our moral maxims and yet still be led astray from adhering to them. Moral religion is a religion constructed for rational creatures who are nevertheless finite, and therefore fallible; the moral norm enables us to constrain ourselves where we might otherwise be led astray.

4. The Ethical Aim of Moral Religion

In *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*, Raimond Gaita writes:

The ethical is a species of the practical and, as such, is purposive: its purpose is to make life better for ourselves and others...the ethical not only roots itself in, but is in all of its unconfused varieties reducible to these facts of, the human condition: we are creatures who can suffer and who can be happy. (Gaita 1991: 65).

Gaita's comments helpfully delineate the ethical aim of moral religion. Moral religion attends to, and seeks to ameliorate, the lived experiences of human beings as capable, acting and suffering, subjects. As this thesis has repeatedly stressed, the role of ethics in Ricoeur's architectonic of moral religion is to ensure that each and every human being may flourish, or pursue uninhibited, to the greatest degree possible, her vision of her own good life.

Gaita's comments also reveal the relation between the three dimensions of life captured by the architectonic. For the ethical, as presented here, is a response to 'facts of the

human condition' which can be interpreted in both anthropological and metaphysical terms (Gaita 1991: 65). Anthropologically, 'we are creatures who can suffer and who can be happy' (65). Human subjects pursue the *telos* of *eudaimonia* or the good life as acting and suffering selves vulnerable to factors beyond their control. Metaphysically, humans are desiring subjects who strive to increase in activity. Activity manifests itself in happiness or joy, while passivity manifests itself in sadness. An increase in activity is therefore tantamount to an increase in joy, and can culminate in the joyful recognition of oneself as inextricably bound both to others and to the whole of which we are all expressions and components.

The ethical aim 'roots itself in' these metaphysical and anthropological 'facts of the human condition' (65) and, in doing so, brings into focus the fundamentally religious nature of the architectonic. Ricoeur's image of the arrow of the religious illustrates how the ethical aim is driven by a desire and a striving to attain the joyful recognition of ourselves and others as part of the whole. The arrow of the religious motivates the desires and efforts of capable human subjects who pursue the good life with and for others in just institutions (cf. Ricoeur 2000a: 207-8).

5. Concluding Remarks: Life

Life has served as the common thread in this thesis linking Spinoza's metaphysics, Aristotle's anthropology, and Kant's moral philosophy within Ricoeur's architectonic. Indeed, my overall line of argument on the hermeneutics of ethical life has been precisely about interpreting moral religion through my threefold Ricoeurian reading of metaphysical, anthropological and moral life.

In *Living Up to Death*, Ricoeur's meditations on life strengthen this common thread uniting the otherwise disparate aspects of his threefold architectonic.¹⁹ This text reflects the simultaneous influences of Spinoza, Aristotle and Kant on Ricoeur's final thoughts about life. There are echoes of a Spinozist conception of Life, presented as a joyful coming to terms with what Ricoeur calls 'the Essential', understood as something more basic, more fundamental, than what we find expressed in the 'codes' of the various great 'confessing and confessional religions' (Ricoeur 2009: 14). To this end, he remarks, 'the Essential...*is* the religious; it is...that which is common to every religion' (14). At the same time, Aristotle's anthropology of human vulnerability can be traced in Ricoeur's critique of 'the insolence of our appetite for an invulnerable life' (11). The latter, he claims, undermines 'the joy of living to the end' as acting and suffering subjects, as capable yet vulnerable beings. To this end, the 'appetite for an invulnerable life', ironically diminishes the actual 'appetite for life' as it is experienced, in all of its messiness and indeterminacy (11).

Crucially, echoes of Kant can also be traced in the text. Ricoeur rejects the striving for an afterlife or immortality on Kantian grounds (Ricoeur 2009: 43-44 ff.). The obsession with an afterlife, and what will happen after death, is, he argues, a selfish obsession: it is self-interested, and therefore heteronomous. Kant's postulate of immortality, on the other hand, should be understood as a postulate for *this* life, which enables the pursuit of the good life lived *up to death*; not lived *for* the afterlife (cf. 54-55).

Ricoeur's affirmation of life is also significant in distinguishing him from other twentieth-century European philosophers. Ricoeur deliberately distances himself from Heidegger's emphasis on death, on the one hand (Ricoeur 2009: 38-39), and Sartre's emphasis on absolute negation, on the other (cf. *FN*). Instead, as this thesis has stressed, life

¹⁹ Ricoeur 2009.

always holds a *positive* role in Ricoeur's philosophy. This point is highly important for fully grasping the nature of his moral religion as a framework for pursuing the *good life*, which culminates in the recognition and affirmation of oneself as part of life. Indeed, it is for this reason that religion and life have to be understood, with Ricoeur, as ultimately inseparable. A positive affirmation of life is the thread that runs through Ricoeur's entire moral religion, from *Fallible Man's* description of the human as the 'Joy of the Yes in the sadness of the finite' (FM 140), to *Living Up to Death's* location of 'that depth, that density of the religious' (Ricoeur 2009: 15ff.) in the fundamental 'desire to be' and 'effort to exist' where the capable human is first struck by the arrow of the religious (Ricoeur 2000a: 207-208).

In sum, then, Ricoeur's architectonic of moral religion provides the framework for a resolute and distinctive philosophy of life. This philosophy is both a joyful celebration of life, and is rooted in life as that which binds us as capable human beings both to each other, and to the whole of which we are each inextricable and irreplaceable expressions and components.

POSTSCRIPT:

SITUATING MORAL RELIGION

The previous chapter concluded the main argument of the thesis by reviewing the key features of moral religion. The chapter focused on the central role held by life as the common thread linking Spinoza's metaphysics, Aristotle's anthropology, and Kant's moral philosophy within Ricoeur's architectonic. It was concluded that Ricoeur's philosophy is characterised by a positive affirmation of life which can be traced from the early philosophy of the will to the final sketches and fragments that make up *Living Up to Death*. This postscript shifts the focus from the form and content of moral religion to its place within the fields of contemporary Ricoeur studies and philosophy of religion. By situating moral religion in relation to other works and trends in these two fields, I hope to provide the reader with a greater understanding of the original contribution to scholarship offered by this critical reconstruction of Ricoeur's philosophical project.

1. Ricoeur Studies

In recent years, a widening gap has emerged between the work undertaken by Ricoeur scholars in North America and those in Europe. In the United States in particular, there has been an overwhelming emphasis on *theological* readings of Ricoeur. Ricoeur's essays on biblical hermeneutics are widely read in seminaries across the United States, and his philosophical writings are largely read with a keen eye for their theological implications.¹

¹ In the last few years the 'Ricoeur panel' has also become a regular fixture at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR). At the same time, it should also be acknowledged that the North American Ricoeur Society has resisted calls to attach its annual meeting to that of the AAR, preferring

Indeed, much of the recent secondary literature on Ricoeur coming out of North America has exhibited a notable interest in closing the gap between Ricoeur's philosophical and theological works by arguing that Ricoeur's philosophical arguments and claims are, whether wittingly or unwittingly, motivated by and reducible to explicitly theological questions and concerns. Publications by James Fodor, Kevin Vanhoozer, Mark I. Wallace and, recently, John Wall and W. David Hall among others, all share this broad interpretative strategy (Fodor 1995; Wallace 1996; Vanhoozer 2007; Wall 2005; Hall 2007).

In Europe, by contrast, the focus has been tied far more closely to Ricoeur's social and political writings. Recent international conferences on Ricoeur held in Europe have addressed his contribution to themes such as recognition and social justice, inviting contributions from former interlocutors such as Axel Honneth.² Meanwhile, European contributors to recent edited volumes on Ricoeur have tended to focus on social and political themes.³

If we can mark out the current map of Ricoeur studies⁴ in very general terms, then, it is characterised by something of an impasse. Those North American theologians interested in interpreting Ricoeur in theological terms reduce his diverse philosophical corpus to a narrow number of theological concerns, while those political theorists interested in interpreting Ricoeur in social and political terms reduce his corpus, *including*

instead to meet in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (SPEP).

² For Ricoeur's engagement with Honneth on the topic of recognition, see Ricoeur 2005: 186ff. Honneth was one of the keynote speakers at a conference held in Lisbon, Portugal in July 2010 on the subject of: 'Reading Ricoeur Once Again: Hermeneutics and Practical Philosophy'.

³ See Greisch 2010 and Barash 2010. See also the latest edition of the journal, *Ricoeur Studies/Études Ricoeuriennes*, which is devoted entirely to the theme of recognition.

⁴ I cannot speak with authority on the growing fields of Ricoeur studies in Africa, Asia and, in particular, South America, where several research networks devoted to Ricoeur are growing at a remarkable rate.

his theological writings, to a narrow number of topics in political theory concerning, for example, ideology, utopia or justice.⁵

Moral religion, as presented in this thesis, charts a third way between these two alternatives, which both risk falling prey to the very blinkered vision which Ricoeur's characteristically holistic approach to philosophical problems sought to avoid. By contrast, reading Ricoeur's corpus in light of a moral religion enables us to interpret the metaphysical, anthropological, moral and ethical dimensions of life through his philosophical architectonic which inevitably will include *both* theological and social/political concerns. Moral religion is therefore to be distinguished from either theological or social/political interpretations of Ricoeur; instead, it offers a broader interpretive strategy with which to render his diverse philosophical corpus consistent, by staying open to the different philosophical dimensions of life. As Walter J. Lowe writes in his introduction to *Fallible Man*, which could easily be applied to the argument of this thesis as a whole:

'Saying 'yes' to the fullness of the human means pronouncing a resolute 'no' to each of the various forms of reductionism, which would constrict or deny the reality of human freedom...the reductionist label applies to any method which seeks to explain away the fullness of our experience by dismissing that experience as 'nothing but' the effect of this or that underlying cause...Ricoeur is apt to suggest that the various forms of reductionism are not so much wrong as one-sided. Like the blind men who encountered an elephant, each is to be credited with having laid hold of a part and having insisted upon its reality. The mistake is in taking the part for the whole. (Lowe 1986: viii-ix)

⁵ See, for example, McNay 2000.

Reading Ricoeur's philosophy as a moral religion ultimately collapses the distinction between the theological and the social/political. For in coming to see ourselves as inextricably bound both to others with and among whom we live, and to the whole of which we are all expressions and components, we recognise that to celebrate life is to celebrate both corporate living and Life as the whole of which we are a part.

Of course, the failure to grasp the holistic nature of Ricoeur's philosophy might be explained by a failure to recognise the strong Spinozist dimension to his thinking, which has been stressed as a major component of the architectonic advocated in this thesis, and which is evident in the description of capable humans as inextricably bound together in the whole. There have been some recent attempts to account for the influence of Spinoza in Ricoeur's later thought, most notably in the work of Richard Kearney (Kearney 2010a, 2010b). Kearney was, of course, responsible for some of the more revealing interviews where the full extent of Ricoeur's appropriation of Spinoza became apparent, and he too takes as his point of departure Ricoeur's interest in a dynamic metaphysics within the history of western philosophy.⁶ However, Kearney places Ricoeur closer to a mystical tradition of modern theology (Kearney 2010a: 59-61) than to the rationalist tradition of moral religion.⁷ By contrast, this thesis builds on Ricoeur's appropriation of Spinoza to locate him in a distinctly rationalist tradition of European philosophy in which the reader can also locate his readings of Aristotle and Kant. This rationalist reading is also in line with the philosophical method behind Ricoeur's hermeneutics, which is governed by a sense of the power and limits of human reason, and also with the overall systematic sense of Ricoeur's thinking, as presented in this thesis.

⁶ cf. Introduction, section 2.4.

⁷ For a survey of this tradition of moral religion, see Wood 1970, who employs this term in his early study of Kant.

2. Contemporary Philosophy of Religion

It is, of course, beyond the scope of this brief postscript to offer a survey of the entire field of analytic philosophy of religion, which is a multifaceted and evolving. However, the fact remains that, despite recent forays by some scholars into studies of the emotions, literature and psychoanalysis in relation to religion⁸, analytic philosophy of religion continues to be characterised in general terms by the analysis of theological concepts and the defence of theism within a largely Christian paradigm. The discussion of analytic theology in the opening chapter of this thesis captures the flavour of much of the work that continues to dominate the field.⁹ By contrast, moral religion as presented in this thesis focuses on the hermeneutics of ethical life: ‘life’ binds human beings together; ethics characterises Ricoeur’s understanding of the good life; and religion in this context becomes a deliberately broad and thin concept which is accessible across a range of religious traditions. Focusing on the ‘essential’ in life instead of ‘God’ supports the later Ricoeur’s attempt to overcome ‘the barrier between religions’ by arriving at a living unity ‘which rips through the veils of the codes of confessional religions’ (Ricoeur 2009: 15, 18).¹⁰ The result is a broadening the field of philosophy of religion beyond the analysis of concepts, focusing instead on the factors which unite us as beings who are given life, develop, come to the fullness of life and to the end of life.

The current state of continental philosophy of religion is even more diverse than its analytic counterpart. Continental philosophy does not demarcate a specific area or

⁸ See notably Cottingham 2005.

⁹ See Introduction, section 1.3.

¹⁰ I have slightly amended David Pellauer’s translation of the original French (see pages 45 and 47 of the original French text).

subject matter as belonging to the metaphysics, anthropology or morality of religion; these fields overlap on the subject of life, so the boundaries between disciplines and fields of ideas are much more fluid on the continent. However, there has in recent years been a well-documented ‘theological turn’ in the Anglo-American world of theology which has come to dominate much continental philosophy of religion in the Anglo-American world of theology.¹¹ This reinscription of theological claims into the philosophy of religion has provoked a critique of theology after the postmodern and the postsecular (Smith & Whistler 2010).

Needless to say, the vision of moral religion defended in this thesis, and Ricoeur’s philosophy more generally, should be distinguished from the theological turn within Anglo-American continental philosophy of religion. For while the later Ricoeur, too, questions the unstable line dividing philosophy and theology, his moral religion is nevertheless rooted in a rationalist understanding of the history of philosophy which remains distinctly *modern*. Granted, Ricoeur appropriates the insights of, among others, the three masters of suspicion, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud in support of his critical hermeneutics. But as previous chapters have explained, Ricoeur builds on these critical insights simply to modify and develop his interpretations of other key thinkers who guide his thought – thinkers deeply rooted in the rationalist tradition of western philosophy – Spinoza, Aristotle, and Kant.

¹¹ See Smith & Whistler 2010: 2ff.

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