


Toward an Ontology of Peace II

Ricœur on the Heart of Conflict and Thumotic Peace

doi.org/10.30664/ar.146536

 Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

 VERTAISARVIOITU
KOLLEGIALT GRANSKAD
PEER-REVIEWED
www.tsv.fi/tunnus

Following Part I, this essay (Part II) continues my attempt to develop an ontology of peace by drawing resources from Ricœur's thought. I begin with Augustine, Dionysius, and Aquinas to show that peace is not contrary to our humanity but is a natural desire that runs with the grain of our being. This account is complicated by the category of the irascible, however, which Ricœur interprets as an appetite for difficulty, suggesting the human desire for peace is not directly continuous with the simple animal desire for rest and repose. Instead, there is a fundamental conflict at the heart of human being, which Ricœur identifies as *thumos*. I argue that *thumos* is not opposed to peace, but instead plays the essential role of mobilizing peace, just as it mobilizes other virtues like courage, moderation, and justice. Moreover, the right ordering of *thumos* does not eliminate the constitutive conflict of the self; right ordering is right conflict, with the right proportion of the disproportion of finite and infinite. As a result, this essay deepens our understanding of peace as more than rest and repose, and in turn also deepens our understanding of what rest is—in faith and hope as the finely tuned affective tension that makes up the self.

Peace sells, but who's buying?

My preceding essay focused on Ricœur's hermeneutics of creation, starting with *The Symbolism of Evil* and leading to later works like *Thinking Biblically*. I argued that an ontology of peace can draw nourish-

ment from Ricœur's hermeneutics of creation as the "originary giving of existence" that establishes being as 1. a divine gift, and 2. very good (Gen 1:31). This very goodness is not a moral judgment concerning an act of will or disposition, but rather the goodness of creaturely being *per se* (Ricœur 1995, 298). At the heart of this goodness is an orientation to peace: creation originates in peace, as a gift of divine love rather than the violent overthrow of primordial chaos; creation holds together in peace and desires peace, here and now as well as eschatologically. Peace is therefore more fundamental than violence. Violence is undoubtedly part of our world, but violence—not peace—is the aberration. In order to live according to this reality, we need to learn to imagine peace. This is a thoroughly Ricœurian point regarding the role of imagination in practice and/or action: the imagination discloses existential possibilities, a world we might inhabit and in which we can act.

This ontology of peace is an appealing vision, but it also raises a difficult question. If we are to imagine peace, why should we suppose that this ontology is true and not just make-believe? In Hemingway's famous words, "Isn't it pretty to think so?" What if

this is just wishful thinking? This is a serious question. Ricœur himself recognizes the problem near the end of *The Symbolism of Evil*, where he argues that the phenomenology of symbols must confront the question of truth—not merely as the internal coherence of the symbols, but with the direct question, “Do *I* believe that? What do *I* make of these symbolic meanings?” (Ricœur 1967, 353–55). The response to this question must be a *wager*—a wager that this particular symbolism can better situate us in being (Ricœur 1967, 356). That is, this symbolism gives a better understanding of the human being, of the being between human beings, and indeed “the being of all beings” (Ricœur 1967, 355). This is how the philosopher can verify the wager existentially. The ontology of peace is indeed a wager, and its ultimate verification will have to be eschatological, since we will not know until the end of all things. But how might imagining peace also better situate us in being here and now?

In this second essay, I respond to this question with some influential thinkers of the ontology of peace—Augustine, Dionysius, and Aquinas—who argue that all being is oriented towards peace, held together by peace, and will be ultimately fulfilled in a state of eschatological peace. Peace runs with the grain of our being; violence does not.

While this metaphysical account is largely compelling, I will also argue that Ricœur gives us phenomenological tools to challenge its working definition of peace as rest and repose, and thereby deepen our ontology of peace. What *is* peace? Augustine *et al.* define it as rest and repose, but Ricœur complicates this definition with his account of *thumos*, which locates desire

for difficulty and even conflict at the heart of the self. We like peace, but we also like difficulty and struggle. *Thumos* lies at the heart of the human being as disproportion and even *conflict*. This conflict is not, however, a symptom of fallenness, but part of the created goodness of the fallible human being. Ricœur helps us to imagine *thumos* in a world at peace. This matters because it helps us to imagine peace as something more than a benign but boring state of being, and instead as the condition for the passionate exercise of the full range of human capacities.

Desiring peace

An ontology of peace stands in contrast to the ontology of violence assumed by many mythic and philosophical traditions. An ontology of violence sees “a human world inevitably dominated by violence”, and attributes this violence to a *mythos* in which violence is inescapable because reality is inherently conflictual (Milbank 1990, 278, 297). An “ontology of violence” is “a reading of the world which assumes the priority of force and tells how this force is best managed and confined by counter-force” (Milbank 1990, 4). In this case, peace is merely a temporary absence of violence or war.

Such is the ontology of Hesiod’s *Theogony*. It is the ontology of Heraclitus: “War [*polemos*] is the father of all and king of all”, and all things “come to be in accordance with strife” (*eris*) (Frs. 53 and 8 in McKirahan 2010, 120, 117).¹ It is the ontology of Hobbes and Hegel, Marx and

1 Also, “war is common and justice is strife (*eris*), and all things happen in accordance with strife and necessity” (Fr. 80, McKirahan 2010, 120).

Nietzsche, Heidegger, Levinas, Derrida, and Deleuze. Each of these thinkers proceeds with the assumption that conflict lies at the heart of being. According to Milbank, this genealogy of ontological violence is fundamental to modern secular thought. That, however, is another story. Our focus has been on how Ricœur's hermeneutics of creation can help us imagine "the possibility of a *different* ontology", which "alone can support an alternative, peaceable, historical practice" (Milbank 1990, 309).

In the biblical symbolism of creation, the self-giving love of God, not *polemos*, is the Father of all. The order of the cosmos is not imposed by violence, as is the case in cosmogonies such as the Babylonian *Enuma Elish*. Instead, peace is the ordering principle by which God directs the whole scheme of things. Early Christian thinkers recognized this aspect of the biblical creation account. Clement of Rome offers a beautiful rendition of this vision in his letter to the Corinthians, where he describes the cosmic order in which everything is governed by divine peace. This is not the random chance of Epicurus, nor the forceful subduing of chaos by the gods, but an order in which everything is subjected to God in peace and harmony: the movement of the heavens, the cycle of the seasons and the change of day and night, the waves of the oceans and the winds of the air, the fruit of the soil, and the fountains that nourish humans and animals alike—all of these have their own activities and limits governed by God. "The very smallest of living beings meet together in peace and concord. All these the great Creator and Lord of all has appointed to exist in peace and harmony" (First Epistle, XX). All creation is directed towards

peace teleologically, since all creatures are directed by their physical and psychic nature towards peace, as well as eschatologically, since peace is ultimately realized in the Kingdom of God.

All creatures desire peace. To paraphrase Saint Augustine: peace is not just for hippies. It is rather "the instinctive aim" of all creatures. It is "the final fulfilment of all of our goals". Augustine makes this argument in his *City of God*, where he appeals to the creaturely desire for peace. For creatures, "nothing is desired with greater longing", and "nothing better can be found" (*City of God* XIX.11). Animals seek peace for themselves, their young, and in society with their species. According to Augustine, "even the most savage beasts ... safeguard their own species by a kind of peace"—caring for their young, preparing shelter, maintaining some kind of society with others in its species. *A fortiori*, humans also seek fellowship with other humans, even in corrupt forms like a band of thieves. Likewise, humans wage war in pursuit of peace, whether for themselves and their own, or to impose their "own conditions of peace" on others. Humans seek peace even when they act unjustly, as with bands of thieves or in waging war. However unjust their actions, their aim is nevertheless to realize some vision of peace for themselves or to impose it on others. War is therefore a deviation from peace rather than vice versa: while there can be peace without war, there cannot be war "without some degree of peace".

The body is oriented towards peace. Bodily peace is "a tempering of the component parts in duly ordered proportion". This peace encompasses bodily health and soundness (*City of God* XIX.13), as well as

the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. On a strictly animal level, the body aims at peace in terms of the “repose of the flesh”, meaning comfortable arrangement of the body’s parts, as well as the satisfaction of its appetites (*City of God* XIX.14). Augustine cites the character of Cacus in Virgil’s *Aeneid*. Cacus is a supremely antisocial creature whose wickedness isolated him from all human relations, yet even Cacus “desired to be at peace with his own body”—to preserve his own bodily life, to have his limbs obey his commands, and to pacify his insatiable desires (*City of God* XIX.12).

Augustine provides some rich phenomenological description of the way this desire for rest is rooted in our embodied being. But humans are directed to ends beyond bodily peace alone. We also seek the peace of the rational soul. Augustine does not separate or oppose peace of body and peace of soul in a dualistic way, however, because the human is meant to regard both in relation to God. They exist in a hierarchical order, so that peace between God and the human being plays out in peace of the soul and peace of the body (*City of God* XIX.14). In this account, peace is primarily a state of rest or repose. The restless body seeks rest, just as the restless heart seeks rest in God. Augustine concludes the *City of God* with an eschatological vision of true peace, with the beatific vision in which we finally behold God. Augustine describes this peace as an eternal leisure, in which we ourselves *become the Sabbath*, in a state of perfect rest and stillness (*City of God* XXII.30).

Given this description, we can see why Augustine believes peace is ontologically fundamental. As he writes, we could have “no kind of existence without some kind of peace as the condition of [our] being” (*City*

of God XIX.13). If a being was entirely at odds with the order of things, that being “would not exist at all” (*City of God* XIX.12). We find similar arguments in the work of another Christian Platonist of late antiquity, Dionysius the Areopagite. In *The Divine Names*, Dionysius argues that the ground of an ontology of peace is God, who “brings all things together”, “unites everything”, and begets “the harmonies and agreement of all things”.² God is “the one perfect Source and Cause of universal peace”, and “the subsistence of absolute peace, of peace in general, and instances of peace” (*Divine Names* 11.1 948D–949A, 11.2 949C). God creates unity, harmony, and concord between all things while allowing them to be themselves:

Perfect peace ranges totally through all things with the simple undiluted presence of its unifying power. [...] It grants unity, identity, union, communion, and mutual attraction to things, thereby ensuring their kinship. [...] It goes out to all things. It gives of itself to all things in the way they can receive it, and it overflows in a surplus of its peaceful fecundity. (*Divine Names* 11.2 952A)

The gift of divine Peace allows beings to be what they are. It ensures that they are not confused with other beings, or that they lose their distinctive ways of being,

2 We find a similar ontology of peace in medieval Jewish philosophers such as Isaac Arama, who writes: “Peace is the thread of grace issuing from Him, may He be exalted, and stringing together all beings, supernal, intermediate, and lower; it underlies and sustains the reality and unique existence of each” (quoted in Ravitzky 2009, 689—see also 688).

so they can continue in their own proper movement and maintain their own proper place—to remain in the activity or movement proper to themselves (*Divine Names* 11.4 952D).

One might object that not all things desire peace, but instead “take pleasure in being other, different and distinct, and they would never freely choose to be at rest” (*Divine Names* 11.3 952B). Dionysius agrees but argues that the effort to preserve one’s identity against confusion or indistinctness is still a desire for peace. The contrary, the disagreeable, even those who seem to delight in anger and strife (like Cacus), are acting from a desire for peace, in their misdirected efforts to set their passions at rest (*Divine Names* 11:5 953A). “For everything loves to be at peace with itself, to be at one, and never to move or fall away from its own existence and from what it has” (*Divine Names* 11.3 952C).

Thomas Aquinas follows Augustine and Dionysius in arguing that all things by nature desire peace (*Summa Theologiae* II–II:29:2). Like Augustine and Dionysius, Aquinas recognizes that the world is filled with violence, and that people’s actions often seem to be motivated by anything but peace. Like these earlier thinkers, however, he explains this as a misguided pursuit of peace. Aquinas argues that the nature of desire itself contains a desire for peace. Desire aims to obtain its object, and to overcome any obstacles that get in the way, in order to enjoy the object in peace. Whenever we desire something we want to obtain it “with tranquility and without hindrance”. Therefore “whoever desires anything desires peace”, whether externally or internally.

Appetite for difficulty

Augustine, Dionysius, and Aquinas share a common definition of peace as rest and repose, quiet and tranquility. In the case of Aquinas, however, this understanding of peace is complicated by his account of the irascible appetite. Aquinas distinguishes between two types of sensitive appetite that are shared by animals and humans alike: the concupiscible appetite seeks to attain that which is suitable to one’s nature and to avoid whatever is harmful, whereas the irascible appetite resists whatever threatens to harm or hinder it (*Summa Theologiae* I:81:2). The irascible is an appetite not for rest but resistance, to take on difficulty and danger. Etienne Gilson gives a provocative gloss to Aquinas’s account of the irascible, writing that the irascible is directed against whatever threatens it, “directed to the destruction of everything that may be contrary to it”, and “to obtain victory and domination over everything opposed to it” (Gilson 1929, 289). Described like this, it sounds like an appetite for destruction and domination is part of human nature. How is this consistent with the claim that all things desire peace?

At the most basic level, the irascible is necessary for self-protection. As Gilson writes, this “force to destroy whatever is inimical” ensures that corruptible beings are not themselves destroyed (Gilson 1929, 288–90). Furthermore, the irascible is also the “guardian and defender” of the concupiscible, which is both the origin and end of the irascible. The concupiscible is drawn to something pleasurable, and the irascible rises to overcome the threat of any enemies, “so that the concupiscible power may enjoy in peace the objects pleasing to it” (Gilson 1929, 289). Although Gilson’s description

sounds more violent than Aquinas's own, the point remains that peace is ultimately the aim of such action. As Aquinas writes later in the *Summa*, "Even those who seek war and dissension, desire nothing but peace" (*Summa Theologiae* II-II:29:2).

Ricœur gives a different interpretation of the irascible. He appreciates the scholastic (in this case Thomistic) insight that the irascible appetite has aims of its own and is therefore irreducible to the concupiscible (Ricœur 1966, 116n.14). Nevertheless, the scholastic definition still views the irascible as subordinate to the concupiscible (Ricœur 1966, 267). Ricœur pushes this idea of the irascible beyond merely defending and securing the peaceful enjoyment of pleasure. On his account, the irascible is different from the biological struggle for food, safety, warmth, etc. Whereas biological struggle seeks equilibrium, the irascible seeks excess; where biological struggle seeks to meet needs, the irascible seeks surplus (Ricœur 1966, 118). This surplus may look and feel like a need (such as the proverbial "need for speed"), but it "is not initiated by any privation, aggression, or hindrance". Instead, we want to assert ourselves, push ahead, go hard, feel our capacities straining. This appetite is "sustained by the imagination" (Ricœur 1966, 119), through which we envision some difficulty, challenge, or obstacle as something worth confronting for its own sake. This "taste for obstacles" is not directed towards satisfaction or satiation in possession, but towards the struggle itself. We have an appetite for the difficult *qua* difficult.

Ricœur raises this issue in *Freedom and Nature*, in his analysis of the body's orientation to value. Beyond simple values of pleasure and pain, our corporeal existence

reveals other values—"special values on the organic level"—that are irreducible to pleasure and pain (Ricœur 1966, 110–11). These values include the useful and non-useful, as well as the easy and difficult. The body finds itself oriented to the easy and the difficult as goods. We experience the easy as good in the absence or cessation "of an obstacle or an impediment", of "release granted to a restrained function" (Ricœur 1966, 112). Less obvious is the experience of the difficult as good, yet we delight in a certain type of difficulty as the chance to exert effort. This is how Nietzsche challenges an ethic of mere well-being: life "aims not only at conservation, but also at expansion and domination. It seeks power, desires obstacles, and positively drives towards the *difficult*" (Ricœur 1966, 116).

The appetite for difficulty can take destructive forms, such as the "'bad infinite' of passions of violence and war"; it can even manifest in a "taste for the terrible, with its latent scorn of pleasure and ease, its disturbing welcoming of suffering, [which] definitely seems to be one of the primary components of the will to live" (Ricœur 1966, 119). This desire "relishes the obstacle even while it anticipates the enjoyment" (Ricœur 1966, 118). More radical still, "the taste for obstacles is a tendency towards choosing suffering itself and sacrificing the pleasure of possession to the pure pleasure of conquest" (Ricœur 1966, 119). It is not simply that difficulty makes the reward more satisfying; the difficulty has a positive value of its own.

Although a passion for violence or war is symptomatic of human fallenness, Ricœur wants to distinguish these passions from the more fundamental, unfallen "appetite for the difficult" (Ricœur 1966,

117). This appetite is one key in the “keyboard of human nature”, which serves “both innocence and fault” (Ricœur 1966, 20–21, 26). The keyboard can be played in a variety of ways, whether in violent struggle and combat, or playful challenge and competition. The appetite for difficulty belongs to the level of fundamental ontology and is therefore “innocent” insofar as it is prior to passions for domination, violence, and war. It is even more fundamental than Nietzschean will-to-power, as the “primitive root” of that will-to-power. It can undoubtedly deviate towards “myths of imperialism and war”. As Ricœur writes, “war is an extension of a disturbing organic tendency with which passionate self-affirmation, a frenzy of auto-affirmation, becomes naturally allied”. Nevertheless, the appetite for difficulty is not destined for war. It can also be directed towards peace.

Ricœur makes a striking remark to this effect: “Peace is always an ethical conquest of the violent will to live; it proceeds from the affirmation of the supra-organic values of justice and brotherhood” (Ricœur 1966, 118). The first thing to notice is that the conquest of peace does not arise from the vital, organic level; as Ricœur argues, “life itself strives for effusion and destruction with an astonishing lack of discrimination”. The conquest of peace comes from “supra-organic values of justice and brotherhood”. This is why we need to learn how to imagine peace: imagination mediates between “vital tendency” and the will. Where this vital organic tendency leads—to play or to combat—depends on how we imagine the world, our situation in it, and our relations with each other.

Another implication is that the human conquest of peace is not, *pace* Augustine,

directly continuous with the simple animal desire for peace as rest and repose. Consider Ricœur’s use of the word “conquest” (*conquête*) to describe peace. This suggests that peace is active, not merely passive or tranquil. It is not simply the “easy”. Peace is not just an absence of war, danger, or disturbance; it is a *conquest*—with its connotations of conquering, overcoming, winning or acquiring by defeat. Moreover, Ricœur’s phrasing suggests that peace is not only the goal of conquest, but the conquest itself. Peace is the “ethical conquest” of a violent adversary—namely, the violent will to live. I do not mean this as some sort of Orwellian trickery, such that “War is peace”. My point is that the irascible is more than an appetite for self-preservation, and that peace consists in the mobilization of a certain irascibility *against* the violent will to live. The truth in this claim becomes more evident, however, when we follow Ricœur in shifting from the idea of the irascible to that of *thumos*.

Thumotic peace

With the transition from *Freedom and Nature* to *Fallible Man*, Ricœur shifts his focus from irascibility to the Platonic idea of *thumos*, which is the spirited element of the soul. *Thumos* moves us to assert ourselves, stirs us to confront difficulties, grows indignant at indignities, strives for excellence, and thrives on competition. Ricœur identifies it with the heart. C. S. Lewis likens it to the chest, mediating between the head and the belly (Lewis 1996, 35–36). I like to think of it as “the eye of the tiger”, alert and ready for challenge.

In *Freedom and Nature*, Ricœur notes the continuity between the Greek *thumos* and the scholastic irascible (Ricœur 1966,

265), but in *Fallible Man* his treatment of affective fragility includes a more thorough critique of the scholastic irascible (Ricœur 1986, 108). The scholastic account errs by deriving all the affections from a few simple passions, which humans have in common with other animals and which combine to form other, more complex passions. We cannot understand the humanity of the human being “by adding one more stratum to the basic substratum of tendencies (and affective states) that are assumed to be common to man and animal”. The old “affective psychology” missed the disproportion or duplexity of human affectivity (Ricœur 1966, 92, 108). Ricœur maintains that the human being is not simple but dual, insofar as we are a relation of the finite and infinite. Ricœur therefore prefers the idea of *thumos* to irascibility because it better accounts for the uniqueness of human affectivity, which results from the disproportion between its finite and infinite poles. The finite and infinite do not correspond to distinct faculties (such as intellect and will) or substances (such as body and soul); instead, the relation between finite and infinite runs across our entire being, from our knowing to our willing to our affectivity (Ricœur 1986, 2–3, 13). We exist as a mixture, a *mélange*, and we bring about mediations of the finite and infinite in our knowing, willing, and feeling. Given this disproportion of the finite and infinite aspects of our being, we do not coincide with ourselves, and this is what makes us fragile, fallible human beings—capable of falling. The scholastic irascible does not reflect this disproportion, and consequently it misunderstands our fragility and fallibility.

While human affectivity is unique because of the disproportion between the

finite and infinite, the scholastic account of the irascible only pertains to the finitude of vital desires for pleasure, comfort, and safety from danger. The cycle of such desire is finite because it has a finite end or goal. The irascible appetite responds to difficulties, obstacles, or dangers that threaten the object of desire, but this is merely a temporary complication of the finite cycle (Ricœur 1986, 126–27). Finite desire is completed in (and confined to) the instant. But humans also undertake existential projects with no set end, such as happiness, beatitude, joy (Ricœur 1986, 93). This is the infinite pole of human affectivity: “insatiable quests”, “endless pursuit” with an “undetermined terminus” (Ricœur 1986, 126–27).

Thumos lives between these finite and infinite poles. It is “the median function *par excellence* in the human soul” (Ricœur 1986, 81). It is the locus of the disproportion between *bios* and *logos*, living and thinking, the vital and the spiritual, the finite organic desire for pleasure and the infinite spiritual desire for totality, or “the all”. *Thumos* is the intermediary, not as a static mean or a point between extremes, but as their dynamic mixture or *mélange* (Ricœur 1986, 9). This is why *thumos* can take the side of either the *epithumia* of the appetites or the *eros* of the intellect; it is “an ambiguous power which undergoes the double attraction of reason and desire” (Ricœur 1986, 8).

Ricœur calls *thumos* “the heart’s humanity”, and like Augustine, Ricœur describes the heart as restless and unstable (Ricœur 1986, 126). It is “the unstable and fragile function *par excellence*” (Ricœur 1986, 8–9). But what Ricœur helps us see is that this restlessness and instability is not necessarily a symptom of fallenness. Instead,

it belongs to the created goodness of the human being. In *Fallible Man* he does this by showing how *thumos* plays out in human desires for having, power, and worth. We are well acquainted with these desires in their distorted forms of greed, domination, and vanity, but Ricœur attempts to draw out the more primordial ontological categories—the keys on the keyboard of human nature—that are “at the root of the fallen” (Ricœur 1986, 111). These desires—what Ricœur calls “thymic quests”—are fragile and fallible, but not necessarily fallen.

Through his examination of having, power, and worth, Ricœur locates *thumos* at the heart of our creaturely being. *Thumos*, and the fundamental disproportion it mediates, is not a symptom of the fall; it belongs to the goodness of creation. This has crucial implications for an ontology of peace. If we imagine peace as rest and repose, of tranquility and quiet, then it might seem that the restless heart of *thumos* would have no place in a peaceful order. Even more pointedly, Ricœur characterizes this disproportion in terms of *conflict*: “the inner conflict of human desire reaches its climax in *thumos*” (Ricœur 1986, 92, 106). As he puts it, “conflict is a function of man’s most primordial constitution”. The self is conflict (Ricœur 1986, 132), and this is part of our created being.³

3 Does this locate conflict at the heart of being—a view I rejected in Part I? There I rejected Levenson’s appeal to the Hegelian master–slave dialectic because it makes God’s being dependent on conflict and struggle, contra the orthodox view of the Triune God whose being is an eternal union of self-giving love and peace. In the present context the question is not the being of God but the human, whose created being includes affective fragility, disproportion, and conflict.

The question, then, is how the self can be constituted by this primordial conflict yet also be oriented towards peace. Does this conflict belong to the goodness of creation? It is important to note that for Ricœur, conflict is not the same as violence; it is part of the fragility and fallibility of created being, which is prior to the fall and its consequences. Thus Ricœur’s famous idea of the conflict of interpretations, for example, is not a consequence of the fall; it refers to the multiplicity of perspectives in hermeneutics, which follows from the finitude of creation, which is fragile and fallible but not originally fallen. Consequently, just as Ricœur can imagine power without violence, since power is a thumotic quest more fundamental than fallenness, for the same reason his account of affective fragility allows us to imagine conflict without violence.

If *thumos* is a conflict at the heart of the human being, this also helps to make sense of Ricœur’s earlier claim that peace is a conquest of the violent will to live. This conquest is the work of *thumos*—not a violent *thumos*, but *thumos* rightly ordered, taking the side of the good against the self’s ignoble, violent will to live at all costs or in the wrong way. There is no shortage of misguided *thumos*, defending its selfish appetites with conduct that ranges from the petulant to the violent, but *thumos* also mobilizes peace, just as it mobilizes other virtues like courage, moderation, and justice.

Thumos is rightly ordered by *logos*, but also by *eros*. As Matthew Crawford observes, Platonic *thumos* has a “perceptive dimension”, as *eros* points us upward towards the good. “We are erotically attracted to beauty because it carries

intimations of good, of an objective order of value. These intimations give thumotic striving its proper direction; thumos without eros would be mere self-assertion” (Crawford 2023, 50). Eros is crucial to self-transcendence, taking the self beyond itself. In terms of Ricœur’s later thought, it is the collaboration of the imagination and desire that makes this possible, disclosing possibilities and quickening one’s desire for them. In terms of *Fallible Man*, eros belongs to the infinite dimension of the self, orienting us towards projects with no finite terminus. Crawford continues:

On the Christian understanding, man is fallen yet drawn toward a perfection that is, in fact, the source of his being, in the image of which he was created. When it is in good order, thumos provides the motive force for this movement toward excellence. (Crawford 2023, 50)

Through *eros* for the Good, *thumos* is mobilized to order the disordered appetites.

This talk of ordering the disordered appetites might suggest a violent conflict of its own, as though the higher must subdue the lower through force. We would then be left with the anthropological equivalent of the cosmogonic myths we discussed in the previous essay, according to which violence is necessary to subdue chaos and bring about an orderly cosmos. In this case the chaos would not be cosmic but psychic, coming from the unruly appetites, but the principle would be the same: violence resides at the heart of being.

Here we need to maintain Ricœur’s category of fragility. Just as creation is fragile, so is human affectivity. This fragility

is originary, but fault is not. Violence is not. The violent will to live is a distortion of the desire to be and the effort to exist. The use of violence to subdue and impose order on chaos through violence is a symptom of the fallen world. But *thumos* is originary, and the thumotic ordering of the soul is not violent suppression but is a spirited subduing directed towards excellences like courage, moderation, justice, and peace—thumotic peace.

The primordial conflict of the self is part of the good but fragile creation. The disproportion of the self is not intrinsically disordered. Ricœur describes the self as stretched “between two fundamental affective projects, that of the organic life that reaches its term in the instantaneous perfection of pleasure, and that of the spiritual life that aspires to totality, to the perfection of happiness” (Ricœur 1986, 132). The point is not for the infinite pole to subdue the finite, but that each would exist in their own proper place, as an ordered disproportion. The well-ordered soul is not one with no need for *thumos*, but in which *thumos* maintains this “affective tension” between the finite and infinite.

Ricœur’s metaphor of stretching, and his phrase “affective tension,” are instructive for how we imagine the well-ordered soul or self. Consider the tension of a stringed instrument in tune. A musical string is tuned by tension, as it is pulled in two directions, and this is precisely what allows it to sound the correct note. Something similar is true of the keyboard of human nature: that affective tension, or conflict, is what makes the self a self. What kind of self would we be without *thumos*?

This affective tension has implications not only for how we understand the self,

but also how we imagine peace. We need not imagine peace as a string gone slack, at rest with no tension, but as a tension in which human desires pull in the right direction and are thereby able to sound the right notes. This tension does not require resolution, but is rather a necessary condition of thumotic peace.

Last things: peace beyond rest

The non-violent conflict of *thumos* is the originary goodness of created being as fragile and fallible but not fallen. If conflict is present at the origin of the human being, should we expect it to be present at the end, in the eschaton? Does *thumos* have a place in the peaceable Kingdom of God? Does conflict require *resolution*? Regarding the conflict of interpretations, Ricœur suggests an eschatological horizon in which meaning is shown as a whole. For now, that is only a hope. Should we similarly hope for an eschatological resolution of the conflict that constitutes the self?

We have focused primarily on the ontology of creation, but as we saw in the preceding essay, Ricœur sees eschatology as the repetition of the symbolism of creation, directed forward to “unknown possibilities” (Ricœur 1995, 299). He refers to “an original but always ongoing creation”, which is “not inert, finished, and closed”, but instead anticipates a coming maturity (Ricœur 1995, 297; Ricœur 1965, 112, 128). Ricœur draws this from his reading of the Church Fathers as well as his biblical interpretation. The symbolism of Adam “is a symbol of the beginning”, but from the start it has a future orientation that is realized in the symbolism of Christ as the second Adam, the new human being who inaugurates “a second creation which will surpass

the first creation by completing it” (Ricœur 1967, 260, 268–69).

We can only assert so much about this; as the first epistle of John reads, “it has not yet been revealed what we will be” (I John 3:2). Some church fathers—specifically Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, suggest that “the soul will eschatologically be identified with *nous*—not the vital/impulsive soul, nor the irascible/desiring soul, since soul’s inferior faculties are adventitious, accessory, and cannot endure” (Ramelli 2018, 291). There is, however, a Christological problem with this kind of thinking; I John 3:2 also holds that when Christ is revealed in the fullness of his return, “we will be like him, for we will see him as he is”. Christ shows us the new human being, and it is not pure *nous*, but the fullness of the human being, including *thumos*.

In the New Testament, the word *thumos* is used more narrowly to designate anger or wrath, and is consequently identified as a work of the flesh, or fallen nature.⁴ But the Ricœurian sense of *thumos*, as spirited mediating element, it is clearly demonstrated in the human beings of the New Testament. John the Baptist, the disciples, the apostle Paul, and Jesus himself show us vivid pictures of *thumos*. We see it in disordered, undeveloped form in James and John, the “Sons of Thunder”, and likewise in the fiery Peter, but this fire does not need to be extinguished; it needs to mature with a vision of the true way of Jesus, who himself demonstrates thumotic peace.

4 II Cor 12:20, Gal 5:20, Eph 4:31, Col 3:8. By contrast, in the book of Revelation *thumos* refers to the righteous wrath of God (Rev 14:10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1, 19).

If Jesus is the second Adam, the new and true human being, then we could argue that *thumos* has a lasting place in the human being. But must the restlessness and conflict that make up the self resolve eschatologically? Ricœur writes that “the Self is never certain: the triple quest in which it seeks itself is never completed. Whereas pleasure is a kind of provisory repose [...] and while happiness would be *par excellence* a lasting peace, *thumos* is restless” (Ricœur 1986, 126). Could this restlessness belong to the lasting peace of happiness—especially the eschatological happiness of eternal happiness? Does the restless heart of *thumos* ultimately achieve rest in God, as Augustine argues in the opening of his *Confessions*? What does it mean for our restless hearts to rest in God?

The biblical idea of *shalom* includes this sense of a peace beyond rest. At one level *shalom* signifies peace as rest or “non-war”, as when Joshua 11:23 says that “the land had rest from war” (Walzer 1996, 96–97).⁵ This is similar to the sense in which we describe violent conflicts as “unrest”. But freedom from unrest is not the full sense of peace as *shalom*, which goes beyond rest to suggest completion, wholeness, and perfection (*shelemut*), as well as harmony and prosperity. This is a state of affairs in relationships, social and political conditions, and the cosmos as a whole as it is ordered by divine grace and flourishing (Walzer 1996, 96; Ravitzky 2009, 685–86, 687–88). This biblical idea of flourishing in the kingdom of God points towards an eschatology that encompasses the full scope of our humanity. This is an important corrective

5 My thanks to Rabbi Joseph Edelheit for recommending Walzer’s article.

to a certain tendency of philosophical theologies—influenced by the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions—to frame eschatology primarily in terms of contemplation. The kingdom of God then starts to sound like an endless church service, rather than the fullness of a new creation. In that case, it seems plausible that there is no need for *thumos*. But if there will be things for us to do in the new heaven and new earth, then a renewed *thumos* makes more sense.

In addition to *shalom* as flourishing, we find another indication of peace beyond rest in Kierkegaard. Like Augustine, for Kierkegaard resting in God seems to be the ultimate goal of the human being. But what interests me is how Kierkegaard characterizes this rest. In *The Sickness unto Death*, he writes that faith is the state in which the self rests transparently in God. And what is the self? The self is a relation, or synthesis, of finite and infinite. Thus our fallen condition is one of misrelation, while the right relation between finite and infinite is one of self-conscious equilibrium in relation to God (Kierkegaard 1980, 13–14, 146). This equilibrium is more like the tension of a tuned string than a static state of repose, just as resting in God is an intense relation, aflame with loving and being loved.

Does this mean, contra Ricœur, that the self is now “certain”, its quests completed? “Certainty” is not the right word, because faith is more a matter of trust, which comes from relational knowing and being known. Perhaps that is the ultimate peace of the heart, restlessly resting in God. ■



Brian Gregor is Professor of Philosophy at California State University, Dominguez Hills. His research concerns the relation between religious faith and human subjectivity. This interest has motivated his work in hermeneu-

tics, phenomenology, and existentialism, and has led to numerous articles and two books: *A Philosophical Anthropology of the Cross: The Cruciform Self* (Indiana University Press, 2013), and *Ricœur's Hermeneutics of Religion: Rebirth of the Capable Self* (Lexington Books, 2019). More recently, his work on hermeneutics has led from the theory of interpretation to a more direct practice of interpreting myth and literature. He also studies ethical and religious formation, and is nearing completion of a book on the practice of philosophy as the art of living, tentatively entitled *A Short History of Philosophical Life*.
bgregor@csudh.edu

References

- Aquinas, St. Thomas. 2017. *Summa Theologiae*. Online Edition by Kevin Knight. Accessed 14.6.2024
<https://www.newadvent.org/summa>
- Augustine, Saint. 1972. *The City of God*. Translated by Henry Bettenson. New York: Penguin Books.
- Clement of Rome. 1885. "First Epistle to the Corinthians". *Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol.1. The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*. Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. Retrieved June 6, 2024. <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01/anf01.ii.ii.xx.html>
- Crawford, Matthew. 2023. "The Rise of Antihumanism". *First Things*. August/September.
- Gilson, Etienne. 1929. *The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Translated by Edward Bullough. New York: Dorset Press.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. 1980. *The Sickness unto Death*. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Lewis, C. S. 1996. *The Abolition of Man*. New York: Touchstone/Simon & Schuster.
- McKirahan, Richard D. 2010. *Philosophy Before Socrates: An Introduction with Texts and Commentary*. Second Edition. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company.
- Milbank, John. 1990, 2006. *Theology and Society Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. Second Edition. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Pseudo-Dionysius. 1987. *The Complete Works*. Translated by Colm Luibheid. New York: Paulist Press.
- Ramellia, Ilaria. 2018. "Gregory of Nyssa", in *A History of Mind and Body in Late Antiquity*, edited by Anna Marmodoro and Sophie Cartwright. Cambridge University Press.
- Ravitzky, Aviezer. 2009. "Peace", in *20th Century Jewish Religious Thought*, edited by Arthur A. Cohen, and Paul Mendes-Flohr. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society.
- Ricœur, Paul. 1965. *History and Truth*. Translated by Charles A. Kelbley. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Ricœur, Paul. 1966. *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*. Translated by Erazim V. Kohák. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Ricœur, Paul. 1967. *The Symbolism of Evil*. Translated by Emerson Buchanan. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Ricœur, Paul. 1986. *Fallible Man*. Revised translation by Charles A. Kelbley. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Ricœur, Paul. 1995. *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, edited by Mark I. Wallace. Translated by David Pellauer. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Ricœur, Paul. 1998. "Thinking Creation". In LaCocque, André and Paul Ricœur. *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ricœur, Paul. 2002. "Ethics and Human Capability: A Response". In *Paul Ricœur and Contemporary Moral Thought*, edited by John Wall, William Schweiker, and W. David Hall. New York and London: Routledge.
- Walzer, Michael. 1996. "War and Peace in the Jewish Tradition", in *The Ethics of War and Peace: Religious and Secular Perspectives*, edited by Terry Nardin. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.