

**The Scoundrel and the Visionary:  
Rawls on Reasonable Hope and the Possibility of a Just Future**

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People criticize some political theories for being utopian in their conception of justice. But utopian thinking need not be a bad thing. It is only when the utopian ideal is considered out of reach that it faces any challenges; and even then, there needs to be an argument for why the mere fact of a theory's unfeasibility makes it a less accurate account for what justice would require of us. It may turn out that justice simply is beyond our reach given our current social and political situation. Further we may have gotten to a point in history where no means remain for us to propel ourselves toward the ideal. The possibility of justice may be a possibility of the past, a missed opportunity. Such prospects are tragic but do not necessarily challenge the correctness of any particular view. But then again, one can argue that an ideal cannot motivate if it is recognized as unattainable. It is one thing to try and achieve a goal that we deem nearly impossible, but what would it look like to try to do something we are certain cannot be done? It seems that we can only try to bring about what we have a glimmer of hope is at least possible.

For this reason, John Rawls asserts that political philosophy ought to be realistically utopian; it ought to extend what we ordinarily take to be "the limits of practical political possibility."<sup>1</sup> A realistic utopia makes us aware of certain available political and social alternatives that we may have previously held as impossible given the non-ideal situation we find ourselves in. But as it does this, it must remain attentive to what we can reasonably hope justice will achieve. In this way, the ideal of a realistic utopia guards against feelings of indifference and futility without prescribing measures supported by nothing more than wishful thinking. Once we are supplied with a realistic utopian understanding of justice, Rawls claims, "No longer simply longing, our hope becomes reasonable hope."<sup>2</sup>

Though somewhat elusive, the relationship between reasonable hope (or faith) and political philosophy is a recurrent theme in Rawls's theory.<sup>3</sup> The relationship seems to be symbiotic. Rawls argues that political philosophy is a non-starter without the support of a reasonable faith in the

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<sup>1</sup> John Rawls, The Law of Peoples [LOP], (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 1999. p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> LOP p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> When Rawls is developing the concept of reasonable hope in Kant's philosophy, he calls it reasonable faith.

possibility of a just future or in the moral nature of mankind.<sup>4</sup> And at the same time, the right kind of political philosophy will foster reasonable hope in us. But what makes hope reasonable? And what sorts of theories of justice are best suited to cultivate our reasonable hope?

To answer these questions, this paper will consist of three parts. First, I will investigate Rawls's conception of reasonable hope and the kinds of unreasonableness Rawls sought to guard against with his account of a realistic utopia. I hope to show how Rawls took the provision of reasonable hope to be a desideratum for any fully adequate theory of justice. Second, I will analyze a specific critique that Rawls makes of a kind of political philosophy that doesn't foster the right kind of hope – namely Marx's Communism. This example shows how demonstrating the absence of resources for reasonable hope can be a powerful form of criticism lodged against a political theory. Finally, I will ask the more substantive question, why do we need reasonable hope in the first place? Why is mere wishful thinking not enough? In response, I defend the value of reasonable hope. I will do this by drawing attention to the interdependence of engaging in political philosophy as a practice and holding out reasonable hope in the possibility of a just future.

### I. The Scoundrel and The Visionary

The idea of reasonable hope gets the most complete treatment by Rawls in his discussion about Emmanuel Kant's conception of *Vernunftglaube* – Reasonable Faith. Rawls expounds on a striking passage from Kant's *Lectures on Religion*:

Kant says, 'Without God I must be either a scoundrel or a visionary.' What he means is that unless I believe in God (whose existence is a necessary condition of the highest good), either I must abandon the moral law as hopelessly impracticable, in which case I am a scoundrel, or else I persist in following the law anyway, in which case I am a utopian visionary. Since reason excludes *both*, I must believe in God.<sup>5</sup>

It is noteworthy that on Rawls's reading, it is not just the utopian visionary that gets panned as the unreasonable one. Since both lack the faith necessary for the proper kind of moral motivation, both the visionary and the scoundrel are forced to act unreasonably. Their unreasonableness manifests itself differently. The visionary is unreasonable in that she is irrationally engaged in a futile project of upholding the moral law and the scoundrel is unreasonable for not having the proper attitude towards the moral nature of humanity and perhaps for unreasonably forgoing the moral law altogether.

Kant's scoundrel and the utopian visionary have natural counterparts in Rawls's own conception of the reasonable. But for Rawls, the scoundrel and the visionary are individuals who lack the appropriate faith in the possibility of a just future rather than the moral nature of mankind rather than in the existence of a God. While Rawls carefully develops the concepts of reasonable persons and reasonable doctrines in his theory, he has considerably less to say about reasonable hope.<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that reasonable hope cannot merely be subsumed under the category of reasonable doctrines. To hope is different than to believe since hoping has cognitive as well as

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<sup>4</sup> John Rawls, *Political Liberalism: Expanded Edition*, [PL] (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1993). P. Lx.

<sup>5</sup> John Rawls *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy* [LHMP], ed. Barbara Herman, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 318.

<sup>6</sup> For Rawls' conception of Reasonable Persons and Doctrines, see especially, PL 48-66. For his account of Reasonable hope see, LHMP p. 309 – 325. See also LOP, p. 23, and PL p. 100 -102, and 172.

conative aspects. Our purely cognitive attitudes like beliefs and hypotheses aim at representing the world as *being* a certain way, whereas conative attitudes like wishes and desires represent the world as *to be made* a certain way.<sup>7</sup> Our hopes do both. They not only track properties in the world as it is (and as it can be), they also involve aspirations and desires for how the world should be made to be. Consequently, we can hope for things that we know we do not have enough justification to believe. Kant makes much use of this distinction. In defense of his faith in the moral progress of human race, he writes:

I do not need to prove this presupposition; it is up to the adversary to prove [his] case. For I rest my case on my innate duty, the duty of every member of the series of generations... to influence posterity that it becomes always better (the possibility of this must, accordingly, also be assumed) and to do it in a way that this duty may be legitimately handed down from one member [in a series of] generations to another. It does not matter how many doubts may be raised against my hopes from history, which, if they were proved, could move me to desist from a task so apparently futile; as long as these doubts cannot be made quite certain I cannot exchange the duty for the rule of prudence not to attempt the impracticable.<sup>8</sup>

Faith for Kant is a matter of practical rather than theoretical necessity. The existence of God and the possibility of moral progress of mankind are not concepts that one can have any empirical knowledge about, since they are ideas that rest beyond what we can possibly know through our experience.<sup>9</sup> Kant does believe, however, that we still have a practical reason to take these ideas to be true and this is where reasonable faith comes in. As long as we are not certain of its impossibility, Kant argues that we can hope for it. What is more, the practical value of certain hopes does more than merely license our faith -- it makes demands on us. We have a duty to work towards the moral progress of mankind and because of this duty we have an auxiliary duty to take such progress to be possible and to take ourselves to be agents capable of bringing such progress about.

Similarly, when it comes to the conviction that God exists, Kant states that “the conviction is not **logical** but **moral** certainty, and, since it depends on subjective grounds (of moral disposition) I must not even say ‘**It is** morally certain that there is a God,’ etc., but rather ‘**I am** morally certain’”.<sup>10</sup> This moral certainty carries with it not only warrant for belief but also normative requirements on individuals to take on the perspective from which the existence of God is true – and true necessarily. It is true *necessarily* because it is necessary for each of us to act in accord with the moral law and in order to achieve this, Kant believes, we must maintain our moral dispositions which depend in part on one’s belief in God. In this way, to have reasonable faith is a moral requirement of a distinctly personal kind. An integral part of the conviction is the inclusion of oneself as the holder of the particular view. Consequently, the relevant conviction requires one to assert the existence of God or the possibility of human progress from the first personal standpoint. Such faith is based on a requirement for us to internalize the conviction that human progress is possible and that God exists

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<sup>7</sup> See, Neil Van Leeuwen, “Imagination is where the Action is”, *Journal of Philosophy*. Forthcoming.

<sup>8</sup> Immanuel Kant, ““On the Common Saying: That May Be Correct In Theory, But It Is Of No Use In Practice.”” 8:309. Also see, 5:133 in Critique of Practical Reason. Both can be found in Immanuel Kant, Practical Philosophy, ed. Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

<sup>9</sup> See Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason* [PR], the Doctrine of Method. Ch. I and II. See specifically A828/B856 to A829/B857. Trans. and ed. by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> Kant, PR, A829/B857. Emphasis original.

in order to actively sustain our moral dispositions and capacities. Likewise for Rawls, reasonable hope grounds in individuals certain moral dispositions that are necessary for the achievement of justice. Reasonable people must have, among other features, reasonable hope in the possibility of justice and in the moral capacities of persons.

In order to tease out the relationship between reasonable people and reasonable hope, we need to look more closely at Rawls's conception of the reasonable and how it differs from the rational.<sup>11</sup> The purely rational person has the capacity to pick out particular life projects and ends and can figure out how to go about achieving those ends. Notably, the rational person need not be purely self-interested, as part of her projects and ends will involve others. She is likely to have associational affinities to family and friends and as a result will take interest in their ends and projects as well as her own. However, all other regarding interests can be reduced to agent-relative interests, so the projects and interests of others are important to the purely rational agent only insofar as those others bear a specific relationship to her.

While Rawls's conception of rationality is relatively capacious, a fully rational person is not yet reasonable. Somewhere in our lives we have encountered perfectly rational people capable of achieving many personal goals who are nonetheless unreasonable in their interactions with others. For Rawls, reasonableness is a kind of disposition; specifically, it is a disposition or willingness to listen and respond to the reasons of others. This willingness has two aspects: the first is for the most part epistemic, it is a "willingness to recognize the burdens of judgment and their consequences"; and the second, which would be better characterized as moral, is a "willingness to propose and honor fair terms of cooperation."<sup>12</sup> Part of being reasonable is understanding our own epistemic fallibility and recognizing the burdens of judgment that give rise to a diversity of perspectives and opinions among reasonable people.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, epistemic and moral strands of reasonableness characterize a person who is both willing and able to heed the claims of others. Such a person sees herself as a member of society made of persons who are capable of moral reasoning and who are also sometimes epistemically fallible. Ideally, according to Rawls, we are both rational and reasonable.<sup>14</sup> It follows that a person who is capable of reasonable hope must be endowed with both of these powers of reason.

One can take the scoundrel and the utopian visionary to represent individuals who only fit half of what it takes to be completely reasonable. The way in which they respond to the impossibility of justice represent two hazards that political philosophy ought to guard against. The scoundrel is merely rational; rather than failing to be moved by the Kantian moral law, under Rawls's theory, she is incapable of being moved by the claims of justice that others in her society make on her. She still has her own projects and the projects of those she cares about to look out for and therefore she may hope for and believe in the possibility of some kind of social progress in the future. But this progress

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<sup>11</sup> PL, p. 48. This is in fact a distinction that he attributes to Kant. The rational is engaged in purely hypothetical reasoning while the reasonable, someone that can be characterized as *vernünftig*, can be moved by the categorical imperative. For Kant, someone who is *vernünftig* is also by definition rational. So Kant's conception of *Vernünftig* entails both reasonability and rationality. Later in this paper, I will use the term reasonable in the wider Kantian sense, rather than the more narrow way.

<sup>12</sup> PL, p. 49, fn. 1.

<sup>13</sup> PL, 54-58.

<sup>14</sup> In his lectures on the history of moral philosophy, Rawls claims that Kant used the word *Vernünftig* – which translates as "reasonable" – to cover both the rational and the reasonable. (See, LHMP, 164-165) Accordingly, to be fully reasonable one must be both rational and reasonable. I take Rawls to suggest something similar when he argues that the two ideas are complementary, "neither the reasonable nor the rational can stand without each other." (See, PL, p. 52)

is not one in which justice can be realized. Instead, the scoundrel has some other criterion of progress in mind. Perhaps on her account social progress is the achievement of social order among members of society who are motivated purely by their own interests or perhaps it is the eradication of as much suffering as possible. Accordingly, the scoundrel's hope can be charged for not being aspirational enough (or for being aspirational in the wrong way); it is a hope based on the assumption that justice is not possible and therefore aims at a state of affairs that is effectively second best.

The utopian visionary, on the other hand, is unreasonable because she is irrational. She is acting irrationally since she does not have faith in the moral nature of others (or in herself for that matter) but is acting as if she did. While she is moved by the claims of others, she does so without the expectation that others will reciprocate or even take her claims into consideration. Correspondingly, she may be seen as having a vision of justice that guides her, but she takes such a vision to be of something that is ultimately impossible. The visionary's hope takes on the form of an illusion or a noble lie.<sup>15</sup> In spite of her recognition that what she hopes for is impossible, she fixates on the hope in order to bring about a more palatable social condition for herself and others. If such hope succeeds at motivating her, it is, at best, an achievement of self-deception. We can call the scoundrel's hope for future progress a case of untoward hope and the visionary's hope for future progress a case of implausible hope. One of the aims of political philosophy, according to Rawls, is to guard against both of these kinds of unreasonableness.

Rawls takes his own project of political philosophy to be one that engages in a non-comprehensive form of reasonable faith. Before forwarding his own political constructivism, he writes, "I believe Kant views the role of philosophy as apologia: the defense of reasonable faith...Justice as fairness would ... accept Kant's view of philosophy as defense this far: given reasonably favorable conditions, it understands itself as the defense of the possibility of a just constitutional democratic regime."<sup>16</sup> His project is not a Kantian defense of the highest good, but a defense of a reasonable ideal of justice that is not only correct but also can be seen as possible. Correspondingly, Rawls's political philosophy provides a purely political conception of reasonable faith, which he calls reasonable hope.

In his theory, Rawls does not intend to defend the possibility of any just society. He is specifically defending the possibility of a just constitutional democratic regime. The defense that Justice as Fairness puts forward is a depiction of a realistic utopia; one that is not only possible but also recognizable in that it maintains certain features of our current political and social institutions and idealizes them. In so doing, Justice as Fairness provides for us what is reasonable to hold out hope for. By showing that a realistic utopia is not impossible, it guards against the irrationality of hoping for something that we are certain will never come about. We are not, as a result, required to take on the visionary's attitude in order to uphold the principles of justice. But what is more, a realistic utopia can support the epistemic and moral reasonableness of our hope as well. Rawls is not merely arguing that such a utopia is possible; he is also entreating us to be willing and open to listen to reasons we were previously closed off to. In his introduction to *Political Liberalism*, Rawls addresses those who are skeptical of his realistic utopian approach:

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<sup>15</sup> See Plato's Republic, Book III, 414-416 and see Sigmund Freud, "The Future of an Illusion" in The Freud Reader, ed. Peter Gay (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1989), 685 - 722.

<sup>16</sup> PL, 101. Noteworthy is that Rawls took Kant's reasonable faith to be not about reconciling faith and reason but about faith in the unity of reason – the practical and the theoretical.

Of course, many are prepared to accept the conclusion that a just and fair society is not possible, and even regard it as obvious. Isn't admitting it part of growing up, part of the inevitable loss of innocence? But is this conclusion one we could so easily accept? What is the effect of our doing so and what is the consequence for our view of the political world, and even the world as a whole?<sup>17</sup>

Rawls takes the lack of reasonable faith to not only be an unappealing attitude about the possibility of a just future, but one that can have real negative affects on our perspective of the present political world. Rawls follows Kant in his claim that lacking reasonable hope about the future makes us unreasonably oriented to our present circumstances and to the people around us. It turns us into scoundrels in the Kantian sense. Accordingly, we have practical reasons to hold out hope for the possibility of a just future. Because of this, a realistic utopia can be seen as a call for reasonableness as much as it is a defense of it. It is because of our epistemic nature that we are vulnerable to the burdens of judgment. This being so, it is only reasonable to not be so quick to presume some utopian-seeming alternatives are beyond what is possible. Additionally, we have moral reason to be willing to listen to the claims of others and see them as persons who are free and of equal moral standing. Therefore, the content of our hope cannot wish this duty away. Because of these normative components of the reasonable, Rawls takes there to be two general possibilities that we must hope for: that a reasonably just society is possible in our future and that people have a moral capacity to which we must not ignore.<sup>18</sup> Any political theory that does not support our faith in either of these two possibilities, either by being inadequately aspirational or by cultivating unreasonable hopes in us, is worthy of criticism. The lack of reasonable hope can therefore be seen not only as a charge against individual perspectives but also against political theories themselves.

## II. Marx's Unreasonable Hope

Surely, it is unreasonable to hope for the impossible. But this is not the only lesson about reasonable hope learned from Kant and Rawls. More significantly, it is also unreasonable to hope for some ends that are both possible and perhaps even feasible but nonetheless are inappropriate for normative reasons. To hope for some ends is to have an unreasonable understanding of history, human motivation or the moral standing and capacities of persons. This sophisticated conception of reasonable hope can supply us with a powerful tool for evaluating political theories in general. We can ask whether a given political theory engenders an unreasonable hope in us.

An example is in order. One may ask, as Rawls did in his *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, is it reasonable to hope for the establishment of a Marxist communist society? Before we investigate this question, I would like to make an important qualification. The account of Marx's theory in this section is based on Rawls's analysis of it in his lectures. The point of this section is therefore not to come to any conclusive evaluation of the merit of Marx's political philosophy, or to even evaluate whether Rawls's interpretation of Marx is an accurate one, but rather to gain greater understanding of what Rawls meant by reasonable hope and how it could serve as powerful form of critique by exposing the unreasonable nature of certain hopes we intuitively hold.

The example of how Rawls understood Marx's communist ideal highlights the difference between that for which it is reasonable to hope and that for which it is merely realistic or rational to hope. This distinction is easily overlooked and thus Rawls's conception of the aims of a realistic

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<sup>17</sup> PL, lviii.

<sup>18</sup> PL, lx.

utopia are often overly simplified as generally providing merely an ideal for which we can realistically hope. It may turn out that what we can realistically hope for will still be unreasonable for us to hope for.

Now back to Rawls's Marx. Rawls sees much to be learned from Marx's vision of a society that is radically egalitarian without the aid of coercion. Ultimately, however, he takes such a vision to be unreasonable but not for the usual reasons. Rawls argues that while it is easy to dismiss communism and its "limitless abundance" as an unrealizable utopia, such considerations do not get at the fundamentally unreasonable position of Marx's theory.<sup>19</sup> Instead what Rawls takes to be unreasonable is Marx's vision of the members in his ideal society. Rawls reads Marx as asserting that equality can be achieved "without any reliance on people's sense of right and justice":

The members of communist society are not people moved by the principles and virtues of justice...People may know what justice is, and they may recall that their ancestors were moved by it; but a troubled concern about justice, and debates about what justice requires, are not part of their common life. These people are strange to us; it is hard to describe them.<sup>20</sup>

Marx found the absence of the concern for justice among citizens to be an attractive feature of his theory.<sup>21</sup> In response to this, Rawls implores, "We should ask ourselves whether this is indeed an attractive feature?"<sup>22</sup> This is not merely a rhetorical question. With an understanding of what makes certain hopes reasonable we are offered the means to answer the question substantively. Accordingly, to hope citizens' sense of justice away is undesirable on two accounts; it is undesirable because it is unreasonable in its conception and because it is unreasonable as a practical matter. Practically speaking, it is undesirable because the stability of just institutions, according to Rawls, is dependent on the sense of justice of citizens, since institutions will not come about or be maintained on their own. On a deeper level, however, to hope for the absence of citizens' sense of justice is also undesirable on moral grounds. Such a hope is unreasonable since it ignores that "having a sense of justice, and all that it involves is part of human life and part of understanding other people and of recognizing their claims."<sup>23</sup> In this way, not only is the content of Marx's hope impractical it is also morally unreasonable. It is particularly a morally unreasonable position for one to take up in our current historical circumstances where we should dispose ourselves to heed rather than wish away people's sense of justice.

I would like to pause on the articulation of the question that grounds Rawls's criticism of Marx. Rawls asks: 'Is this indeed an attractive feature?' While vague, this question gets to the heart of what lies within the limits of what it is reasonable to hope for. Marx hopes for a society that features an absence of people's sense of justice. This is indeed a distinctive sort of hope that is based on Marx's particular conception of ideology and perhaps, therefore, not one that others share. But armed with a sophisticated understanding of the reasonable, we can ask similar questions about more commonly imputed social ills we tend to find around us. We can ask, taking *x* to be whatever social ill we wish to do away with, whether or not the hope for *x*'s absence in the future is a case of

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<sup>19</sup> John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy* [LHPP], ed. Samuel Freeman. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). 371.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> This is, in large part, because the ideological nature of the concept of justice. See "On the Jewish Question", and also, Wood, Allen, 1972, 'The Marxian Critique of Justice', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1: 244-82.

<sup>22</sup> LHPP, p. 371.

<sup>23</sup> LHPP, 372.

reasonable hope. Is the absence of coercive force, for instance, a reasonable hope? Or the absence of all disagreement about moral and political questions? By taking seriously the moral and epistemic aspects of reasonableness, some answers may surprise us.

Part of the aim of a realistically utopian theory is to present an approach for how we are to look at our historical and social conditions. Of those conditions that we think are in need of remedy, only certain things are reasonable to hope away. It is unreasonable to hope to remedy some social or political conditions because it would be impossible to do so (for example, unequal distribution of talent); it would also be unreasonable to hope to remedy certain conditions because the political means to do so would be unreasonably coercive or unappealing (for example, the hope to end all forms of disagreement). But I have been arguing that Rawls's appeal to reasonable hope evinces a subtler point, which provides us with an orientation to the political world that we find ourselves in right now. Sometimes it is unreasonable to hope to remedy certain conditions we take to be social ills even when to do so is both possible and practicable. This is because the hope betrays a moral or epistemic unreasonableness on our part. The content of the hope itself is unreasonable rather than the empirical implications about what it would take to bring the hope to fruition. Marx's hope that equality is possible without the need for members of society to have a sense of justice is such a case according to Rawls. Also a Hobbesian hope for social order that is not motivated by individual's sense of justice can likewise be deemed unreasonable.

In this way, political philosophy, when it aims at being realistically utopian, provides for us an opportunity to reorient ourselves to our specific political condition. Some political conditions that we would have previously thought to be in need of remedy turn out to be compatible with the ideal of justice. This reorientation is not a result from our compromising what we take to be ideally just to fit more easily with what we think is feasible. Instead, we are reoriented to see that certain political conditions we had previously thought to be detrimental to justice turn out to be valuable in their own right.

So far, I have presented the general kind of reasonable hope that Rawls and Kant take to be essential to political philosophy. I have also investigated how certain utopian theories, according to Rawls, may turn out to garner unreasonable hopes in us – both because of their impossibility and because of how they betray an unreasonable understanding of society and persons. A realistic utopian theory is meant to both cultivate our reasonable hope as well as expose the unreasonable nature of certain other hopes we intuitively hold. The discussion to this point has presented some practical advantages that reasonable hope provides as well as revealed the faults of a political theory that cultivates unreasonable hope in us. But what about a theory of justice that neither supports nor undermines one's reasonable hope? Is there anything lacking in a theory of justice that remains agnostic about whether or not a just future is possible? The next section will address this harder question.

### III. On The Hope For a Just Future

The idea of reasonable hope defended by Kant and Rawls is distinctively temporal. It is the hope that justice is not only a social possibility for human beings, but that it is possible for *us* in *our* future. Specifically, both Rawls and Kant hope that justice is a state that is accessible to us and appeal to individuals to have faith that this hope can be realized.<sup>24</sup> Kant's understanding of

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<sup>24</sup> On the difference between feasibility and accessibility, and stability see G.A. Cohen's [Why not Socialism?](#) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 56-57. According to Cohen, the question of a whether a theory of justice is accessible, one is to ask: "Can we get to the ideal from where we are?" On the question of whether or



reasonable faith goes a step beyond that of Rawls. He additionally believes that we must not only hope that a just future is possible; we must also hold the conviction that it is in fact accessible to us.<sup>25</sup> This is a significant difference between the two philosophers. For Rawls, only faith in the possibility of justice is a necessary precondition for having the appropriate political dispositions. Rawls makes no stronger claims about whether we can or should suppose that a just future awaits us. Nevertheless, Rawls and Kant both cleave to the hope that the ideal of justice depicts a state, however unlikely or far off, that we can potentially get to from our current social condition. Is such a hope really necessary?

Contrast this type of hope to the account put forth by Rousseau in which a just state may no longer be achievable. Rousseau takes humankind to be good by nature and it is our current society that depraves us and makes us miserable.<sup>26</sup> Because of this he famously argues that the starting point of thinking about justice is to take “men as they are and laws as they might be.”<sup>27</sup> According to Rousseau, we must proceed cautiously in constructing our political principles in order to ensure that the normative possibilities of our theory are not arbitrarily limited by the natures of beings whose moral capacities have been dwarfed by unjust social conditions and historical circumstance. Unfortunately, given the high demands of justice and the present state of human society, it can be inferred that humankind may have passed the point in which justice can still be hoped for. Due to our historical circumstances, it is likely that we (and our descendents) are no longer capable of living up to the prescriptions of justice. However, Rousseau adds one conciliatory point, had we been born under happier circumstances we may have been capable of measuring up.<sup>28</sup> Under the Rousseavian account, therefore, justice is within the realm of possibility since there is nothing inherent to our nature that is incompatible with it, but it may no longer be achievable by us given how history turned out.

There is a difference in these two accounts of the kind of perspective that it is reasonable to hold when it comes to the possibility of justice. It is one thing to believe, with Rousseau, that our deep natures are not incompatible with the possibility of a just society. It is something further to harbor any hope for such a possibility in the future.<sup>29</sup> Rawls himself invokes Rousseau’s approach to taking men as they are and laws as they might be in framing his realistic utopia. So why does Rawls make the stronger Kantian claim that hope for a just future is necessary to political philosophy – or at least to a theory of justice? Even if a person were to think that a just society would never transpire, such a belief does not provide an obvious basis for rejecting the ideal. That person can still

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not it is feasible, one is to ask: “Would the ideal work and be stable, if we were indeed in a position to institute it?” On whether the theory is endowed with stability: “Would the workings of the society reinforce or undermine its values?”

<sup>25</sup> Kant writes, “Now since we must necessarily represent ourselves through reason as belonging to such a world [a moral world], although the senses do not present us with anything except a world of appearances, we must assume the moral world to be a consequence of our conduct in the sensible world; and since the latter does not offer such a connection to us, we must assume that former to be a world that is future for us.” *PR* A811/B839

<sup>26</sup> J. Rousseau, *Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*, ed. Roger Masters and Christopher Kelley, trans. Judith Bush, Masters and Kelley (Hanover: University of New England, 1992), p. 213.

<sup>27</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, Trans. and ed. by Donald Cress. (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 1987), p. 17.

<sup>28</sup> For an illuminating account of Rousseau’s approach, see Joshua Cohen, “The Natural Goodness of Humanity” in *Reclaiming the History of Ethics: Essays for John Rawls* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>29</sup> I thank Dave Estlund for pushing me on this point.

reasonably wish for justice to transpire, even if hoping for it is out of the question.<sup>30</sup> For the person that just doesn't have the requisite hope, isn't mere wishful thinking enough?

Underlying this question is a disagreement about the value of theorizing about justice in the first place. We have seen how Kant and Rawls take the practice of political philosophy to be undermined were one to not take justice to be possible in the future. However, were one to believe that justice were no longer possible, one is still clearly capable of engaging in valuable inquiries about justice. The impossibility of justice doesn't stop us from investigating the nature of the concept or imagining what an ideal society would look like. Moreover, such a presumption may allow us to finally grasp how tragically short we fall from achieving that ideal. This realization may force us, in turn, to more honestly engage in other forms of political theorizing in which we set down the norms for how to live together in this nonideal state. These are only two consequences among many of doing political philosophy in the absence of hope for justice in the real world. We need not discount the value of such approaches in order to defend the valuable function that reasonable hope can provide.

Nevertheless, the value of reasonable hope for theories of justice may be clearer if we investigate the difference between engaging in theorizing about justice that makes no suppositions about the possibility of a just future and doing so under the auspices of reasonable hope. This difference can be characterized by saying that political philosophy that is indifferent to hope is an *imaginative* practice whereas political philosophy that requires reasonable hope is an *anticipatory* one. This difference is analogous to a distinction made by David Velleman between imagining future selves and anticipating ourselves in the future.<sup>31</sup>

Velleman describes imagining a future self as a two-step process. First, the person has to stipulate who this future self will be and once the future self has been determined, the present self can imaginatively see from that future self's perspective.<sup>32</sup> In this way, when a person imagines her future self, that person lacks an intimacy with that self; imagining a future self is just like imagining the perspective of some other person. In contrast, there is no intermediary step when one anticipates oneself in the future. There is no need to determine who this future self is going to be because the answer is evident: the future self is the person that has direct psychological access to "me" right now. What is more, one anticipates a future in which the anticipation itself can be remembered and could have had some effect on the outcome; what one is doing now can be incorporated into the future view.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, anticipation is not only a mental exercise, but can itself be efficacious, though its efficacy cannot be guaranteed.

Analogously, mere wishful thinking about a just future involves imagining people like ourselves in the future whereas reasonable hope involves anticipating what that future will be like with us (or people who are intimately linked to us) in it. Correspondingly, reasonable hope allows us to see the just future as accessible to us and therefore see our actions and practices, including the practice of political philosophy, as shaping what that future will entail. If we are engaging in political theorizing about matters of justice and hopeful that a just future is at least possible, we are thinking about individuals in the future that are inextricably caught up and potentially affected by our

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<sup>30</sup> I take wishing to be less constrained by our cognitive understanding of what is possible in the world in comparison with hoping. It is reasonable for me to wish that I had the capacity to read minds even though this is something it is unreasonable for me to hope for.

<sup>31</sup> David Velleman, "Self to Self", *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 105, No. 1 (Jan. 1996), 39-76.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* p. 70.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* p. 72.

theorizing.<sup>34</sup> By being affected by our current actions, practices and anticipations, these people are connected to us in the way that imagined future people in an inaccessible just world are not.

Ultimately, individuals may not be able to choose whether one takes the more hopeful or more pessimistic approach to doing philosophy. It is plausible that while practical reasons may justify a preference for having faith in the possibility of a just future (or in denying such a possibility), they do not provide epistemic justification for actually having such faith. This is because it may be beyond our voluntary control what we can have faith about. One can imagine a person who simply doesn't have the appropriate hope in the possibility of a just future. Telling that person that she has practical reasons to have such a hope doesn't help much. However, I have been arguing that this is the wrong understanding of what hoping entails. If we are to conceive of reasonable hope as a disposition that can be cultivated, rather than merely an epistemic state that we happen to find ourselves in, then it is possible that practical reasons may count in favor of one approach rather than the other. Such reasons may not play a role in how individuals deliberate about whether or not to hold out hope for a just future; instead they may inform how political philosophy, as an educative practice ought to be publically carried out.<sup>35</sup>

I take this to be the conception of hope that is present in Rawls and Kant. Rawls believes that how we answer the question whether or not justice is possible "shape[s] the underlying attitudes of the public culture and the conduct of politics."<sup>36</sup> While one ought not overestimate its influence, Rawls is right to place political philosophy in the world and to see it as having some practical (albeit indirect and slight) affect on the culture in which it is situated. While Rawls does not take the aim of the principles of justice to be action guiding in any direct sense, he does have a concept of the political philosopher as a real person in society that has some affect on the course of history. To support this depiction, he points to past events in which academic pessimism precipitated gross political injustice. One such event is the fall of the Weimar regime, which was due, in part, to the lack of support from German intellectuals of the time. Rawls portrays these intellectuals as no longer possessing the hope that justice could be achieved under a parliamentary system – they thought, "its time had past."<sup>37</sup> This lack of hope, on Rawls's perspective, paved the way for the atrocities of the Second World War.

And so, the conception of reasonable hope provides some guidance for how we are to navigate the less than ideal world we now cohabitate with others. First, it provides for guidance about what is and is not reasonable to hold out hope for. There are certain social conditions we find ourselves in now that we can reasonably hope away, but there are other conditions that we must be reconciled to as general facts about human society and not work to alleviating. Reasonable hope thus delineates the scope of changes that is appropriate for us to work toward. Reasonable hope also supports the political dispositions that are necessary for the achievement of justice. Rawls argues that if we can reasonably hope that someone someday will "somewhere achieve a realistic utopia; we can then do something toward this achievement."<sup>38</sup> One thing that reasonable hope allows us to do that is minor (but quite relevant to political philosophers) is to conceive and anticipate a just future for people that are inextricably connected to our current activities and

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<sup>34</sup> Velleman argues that we care more about the future selves that we anticipate than we do about the future perspectives that we can imaginatively take up. This isn't merely an empirical claim but a normative one. We care more about our own anticipated perspectives because they matter more to us. These are the people "whose experiences [we] cannot prefigure without already being caught up in them." See, *Self to Self* p. 74.

<sup>35</sup> Rawls, *LHPP*, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Rawls, *LP*, lxi.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *LOP*, 128.

practices. Through reasonable hope we are capable of situating ourselves not as individuals but as members of an ongoing society that have causal affects on future generations. Consequently, we see our fortune bound up with the fortune of our children and more distant future generations.