On Reasonable Hope

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Abstract: John Rawls has argued that one of the aims of a theory of justice is to offer us reasonable hope for a just future. But what makes hope reasonable? And is it misguided to think that reasonable hope is a proper aim of political philosophy? In this paper, I trace the development of Rawls’s conception of reasonable hope by looking more closely at his treatment of Immanuel Kant’s conceptions of Reasonable Faith and of philosophy as Apologia. The idea of reasonable hope goes beyond the weaker kind of “reconciliation” put forward by Rousseau’s account of a conjectural history. 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 this in the future. I argue that this temporal aspect, which is built into what Kant and Rawls mean by reasonable hope, is a useful approach to the practice of political philosophy. An approach that takes the need for reasonable hope seriously is one that moves political theorizing from a more passive framework of theoretical imagination toward a more active one that entails political anticipation.
John Rawls asserts that political philosophy ought to be realistically utopian; that is, it ought to extend what we ordinarily take to be “the limits of practical political possibility.” On his view, a realistic utopia makes us aware of certain available political and social alternatives that we may have previously thought impossible given our non-ideal circumstances. But as it does this, it must remain attentive to what we may plausibly hope justice will achieve. In this way, the philosophical ideal of a realistic utopia guards against potential feelings of indifference and futility regarding justice without prescribing political 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.”

But what makes a hope reasonable? And what sorts of theories of justice are best suited to cultivate in us a reasonable hope for a just future? These are the general questions that I will investigate in this paper. While I think that on their own these questions merit philosophical interest, I also ask them here in order to clear up some confusion about what Rawls has stated to be the aims and constraints of his political theorizing.

In his attempt to construct a realistic utopia, Rawls has received criticism from opposite camps. Some have seen Rawls’s attempt to be “realistic” as an unwarranted compromise of the philosophical ambitions of his view. Others have argued that his “utopian” idealizing abstracts away from the real and distinctly political challenges we face.

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2 LOP, p. 23.
3 A prime example of this criticism is G. A. Cohen, has argued that in an attempt to come up with principles of justice that are realistic, Rawls has made his theory sensitive to facts about human motivation and feasibility, which Cohen believes have no bearing on the nature of justice. In doing so, Rawls has unwittingly watered down his view so that it offers us the optimum rules for social regulation, but not a fully realized conception of justice. See Rescuing Justice and Equality, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), esp. chs. 6-7.
and thus offers an inadequate conception of justice for us in the here and now. Given these two critical positions, it’s tempting to understand Rawls’s realistic utopia as an attempt to tread “a middle path” between the extremes of extravagant idealism and cynical realism. This understanding could be a cause for admiration of Rawls’s moderation or it could be lamented as an unhappy concession – a sort of “halfway house” of a view that is too ideal to be useful but not ideal enough to be true. However, regardless of whether one is moved to celebrate or lament Rawls’ apparent moderation, seeing things this way portrays his proposal of a realistic utopia as an attempt to offer a compromise between the pulls of pragmatism and idealism.

The aim of this paper is to argue against this gloss of Rawls’s view. In order to see what is mistaken about such a portrayal, we must investigate why Rawls thinks it important for political philosophy to offer a realistic utopia in the first place and how this relates to his conception of reasonable hope. The reasonableness of our hopes is not determined by what it is pragmatic to hope for. This means that what it is reasonable to hope for, according to Rawls, is a more substantive matter than merely identifying what it is not crazy, naïve, or impractical to hope for. By saying that his realistic utopia can offer us reasonable hope for a just future, Rawls is defending his conception of justice as one that is worthy of our hope.

Rawls takes himself to follow Immanuel Kant in his conviction that a central function of


7 As Sen claims, “Rawls makes a compromise towards pragmatism at the cost of an imaginary ideal.” The Idea of Justice, p. 412. Fn. ??

8 Here I am in agreement with Paul Voice when he presents the following question as the guiding question of Rawls’s theory: “Is the realization of the world according to this theory worth hoping for?” in Rawls Explained. [p. 8] DESCRIBE DISAGREEMENT: Voice seems to hold the view that what is worth hoping for can be understood both pragmatically – hopes are worth it when they motivate us, as well as theoretically – hopes are worth it when the objects are desirable and possible. I will argue that Rawls’ Apologia can be seen as vindicating our hopes without relying on the pragmatic benefits of holding such hopes.
philosophy is to engage in “apologia” by offering a vindication of a certain set of hopes by shifting the burden of proof onto those who would doubt them. Accordingly, one important task for political philosophy is to demonstrate how the hope we already feel is indeed reasonable by offering a more determinate picture of what sort of just future it is worth holding out hope for.

The paper consists of four parts. First, I investigate Rawls’s explicitly Kantian understanding of what makes our hopes reasonable. Second, I will take a step back from Rawls’ view and elaborate certain features of the attitude of hope from the perspective of moral psychology. In this section, I will examine whether Rawls’s conception of what makes hopes reasonable is compatible with a more general conception of what makes hopes fitting. I think that the standards of reasonability and fittingness are compatible. To illustrate this, in the third section, 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 Karl Marx’s Communism.

Given that Rawls is a proponent of a realistic utopia, one may expect that Rawls’s main charge against Marx’s utopian thinking is that it is overly unrealistic or impracticable. However, I will show that the main criticism that Rawls launches against Marx’s ideal is not that it is impracticable but rather that the ideal is not desirable and therefore is unbefitting of our hope.

In the final section of the paper, I will tentatively defend the Rawlsian view that an important function of political philosophy is to cultivate reasonable hope in a just future. The idea of reasonable hope goes beyond the weaker kind of “reconciliation” put forward by Rousseau’s account of a conjectural history that sketches a picture of how we could have developed into the kind of people for whom justice is possible. It is one thing to believe,

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9 PL, p. 101.
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 this in the future. I argue that this temporal aspect, which is built into what Kant and Rawls mean by reasonable hope, is a useful approach to the practice of political philosophy. An approach that takes the need for reasonable hope seriously is one that moves political theorizing from a more passive framework of theoretical imagination toward a more active one that entails political anticipation.

§1. The Scoundrel and The Visionary: Rawls and Kant on Reasonable Hope

To get a better grip on the idea of reasonable hope let us begin with Rawls’s discussion of 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.

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 described as unreasonable. However, 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 in forgoing the moral law altogether. To understand the

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10 For Rawls explicit discussion of Reasonable hope see, LHMP p. 309 – 325. See also LOP, p. 23, and PL p. 100 -102, and 172.
significance of these two possible manifestations of unreasonableness, let us first look at elements of Kant’s conception of reasonable hope and then see how these features are echoed in Rawls’s political theorizing.

Kant famously claims that there are three guiding questions that unite all of his philosophical inquiry: “What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope?”[12] Whereas the first question is about the theoretical limits of knowledge, and the second question is about the practical limits of our action, the third question is about the permissibility of certain attitudes we hold. ‘What may I hope?’ is a question about what I am entitled to hope for. It is thus a question about rights rather than duties and so requires vindication rather than outlining a set of limitations.

The hope that Kant attempts to vindicate throughout his inquiry is the hope that our happiness will be proportional to our virtue. Kant believes that we are the sorts of creatures for which hope for happiness comes naturally. In his philosophical inquiry he aims to defend such a hope as compatible with our reason. To do this, he must show how such hopes are not in conflict with the dictates of theoretical and practical reason, and also he must better define the plausible contours of such a hope. Kant argues that such a hope is not incompatible with the dictates of practical reason as given to us by the moral law. This is because the moral law offers us a system that is “self-rewarding:” if everyone acted according to the moral law then we would all be collectively “the authors of [our] own enduring welfare and at the same time that of others.”[13] However, the self-rewarding system is only realized when everyone does what they ought to do. Our use of theoretical reason shows us that we do not live in such a world, but it also does not rule out the possibility that we could

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live in such a world.\textsuperscript{14} Regardless of the world we live in, the moral law still requires us to act according to its dictates without the guarantee that others will do the same. So what we ought to do is to act in a way that in an ideal world would make us happy and in this world makes us worthy of such happiness. What is reasonable to hope for, then, is not happiness simpliciter, but rather happiness in proportion to our virtue. This, according to Kant, is hoping for the highest good. This more specific hope is reasonable because it coheres with our practical duties and is not undermined by our theoretical speculation.

Thus Kant’s defense of hope as reasonable requires the use of both practical and theoretical reason. This makes sense since hoping has cognitive as well as conative aspects. Our purely cognitive attitudes like beliefs and hypotheses aim at representing the world as \textit{being} a certain way, whereas conative attitudes like wishes and desires represent the world as \textit{to be made} a certain way.\textsuperscript{15} Our hopes do both. They not only track properties in the world as it is (and as it can be), they also involve aspirations for how the world should be made to be. Consequently, we are entitled to hope for things to happen that we know we do not have enough justification to believe will happen. On the other hand, we are not entitled to hope for certain prospects when our evidence can rule them out as impossible.

Kant makes much use of this distinction between hopes and beliefs. In defense of his faith in the moral progress of human race, he writes:

\begin{quote}
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
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{14} And even if we did, given that we have no way of knowing people’s motivations for action (either our own motivations or the motivations of others), we can never be sure whether we lived in such a world.

\textsuperscript{15} See, Neil Van Leeuwen, “Imagination is where the Action is”, \textit{Journal of Philosophy}. 2011.
doubts cannot be made quite certain I cannot exchange the duty for the rule of prudence not to attempt the impracticable.16

Faith for Kant is a matter of practical rather than theoretical necessity. The existence of God and the possibility of moral progress of humankind 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.17 Kant does believe, however, that we still have a practical reason to postulate these ideas as true.

Then again, it would be wrong to say that theoretical reasoning has no place in what we can plausibly hold out hope for. While there is insufficient evidence to prove that humankind is indeed progressing, Kant makes use of his theoretical reason to show that there is also insufficient evidence to disprove such progress. It is in this combination of practical necessity and theoretical license that reasonable hope emerges. As long as we ‘cannot be made 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 possible certain demands on us. According to Kant, we have a duty to work towards the moral progress of mankind. As a condition of this duty, we must be able to view such progress as possible and to take ourselves to be agents capable of bringing such progress about. We would not be able to live up to these duties without the appropriate hope.

Kant’s scoundrel and the utopian visionary have theoretical counterparts in Rawls’s own conception of the unreasonable. For both Kant and Rawls, reasonable hope grounds in individuals certain moral dispositions that are necessary for the achievement of the social

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16 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.
good. Reasonable people must have, among other features, reasonable hope in the possibility of justice and in the moral capacities of persons. Those who lack the appropriate hope are made susceptible to bouts of unreasonableness. Of course, on Rawls’s view, such individuals will lack the appropriate faith in political possibilities rather than in metaphysical ones. The way in which they respond to the ostensible impossibility of justice represent two hazards that Rawls thinks political philosophy ought to guard against.

While Rawls carefully develops the concepts of reasonable persons and reasonable doctrines in his theory, he has considerably less to say about reasonable hope. For clues as to what he could be mean by “reasonable hope” specifically, let’s look more closely at Rawls’s conception of the reasonable and how it differs from the purely rational. 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 doesn’t need to 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. One may have encountered perfectly rational people capable of achieving many personal goals who are nonetheless unreasonable in their interactions with others. For Rawls, reasonableness manifests itself as a willingness to listen and respond to

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18 That is, rather than lacking faith in God, or the afterlife, or that one will enjoy happiness in proportion to one’s virtue, a Rawlsian scoundrel and visionary will not be hopeful about the possibility of justice.
19 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.
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 ethical, is a “willingness to propose and honor fair terms of cooperation.” 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. Therefore, epistemic and ethical strands of reasonableness characterize a person who is both willing and able to heed the claims of others. Ideally, according to Rawls, we are both rational and reasonable. It follows that a person who is capable of reasonable hope must be endowed with both of these powers of reason.

Given this specification of reasonability, we can take the scoundrel and the utopian visionary to represent individuals who fulfill only half of what it takes to be fully reasonable in the Rawlsian sense. The scoundrel represents a person who is merely rational. Rather than failing to be moved by the Kantian moral law, under Rawls’s theory, the scoundrel is incapable of being moved by the claims of justice that others in her society demand of her. She may still have 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, while still desirable by her lights, 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 order and security among members of society who are motivated purely by their own interests or perhaps it is the

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20 PL, p. 49, fn. 1.
21 PL, 54-58.
22 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)
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 less desirable.

The utopian visionary, on the other hand, represents a person who is unreasonable because she is irrational. 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. 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 justice a case of implausible hope. One of the aims of political philosophy, according to Rawls, is to guard against all kinds of unreasonableness. Therefore, in presenting a realistic utopia, Rawls can be understood as attempting to show us that we can hope for such an ideal without these hopes being characterized as either untoward or implausible.

Rawls takes his own project of political philosophy to be one that defends 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

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of the possibility of a just constitutional democratic regime.”

It is significant that Rawls does not defend the possibility of any just society. He is specifically defending the possibility of a just constitutional democratic regime. This is a depiction of a realistic utopia that is not only possible but also recognizable in that it maintains certain features of our current political and social institutions and idealizes them. By showing that a realistic utopia is not impossible, Rawls's theory 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. For example, in his introduction to Political Liberalism, Rawls addresses those who are skeptical of his realistic utopian approach:

> 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?

Rawls takes the lack of reasonable hope 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. It is because of our epistemic nature that we are vulnerable to the burdens of judgment. This being so, the epistemically reasonable perspective to take is

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24 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. “Kant shifts the burden of proof: the affirmation of reason is rooted in the thought and practice of ordinary (sound) human reason from which philosophical reflection must begin. Until that thought and practice appears to be at odds with itself, it needs no defense.”

25 PL, lviii.
one that is not so quick to presume some utopian-seeming alternatives are beyond what is possible. Additionally, the ethically reasonable perspective to take is one of willingness to listen to the claims of others and to be motivated to do one’s part in ensuring that these others are treated as persons who are free and of equal moral standing. 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.

In light of these normative components of the reasonable, Rawls takes there to be two general possibilities that we are reasonable in hoping for: (1) that a just society is possible in our future and (2) that people have a moral capacity to which we must not ignore. Any political theory that does not support our faith in either of these two possibilities, either by being inadequately aspirational or by cultivating implausible hopes in us, is worthy of criticism.

§2. Is What it is Reasonable to Hope for Befitting of our Hope?

There is a potential difficulty in the way that the defense of reasonable hope has been presented so far. One could worry that in offering a defense of what it is reasonable to hope for, which is distinctly practical in emphasis, Rawls is offering us the wrong sort of justification. That is, he is presenting us with considerations in favor of holding an attitude of hope without necessarily making the case that the specific hope is fitting.

There is a difference between offering reasons for why it would be better to be hopeful about some desired political end – rather than being resigned or indifferent to that end – and offering reasons for why some desired political end merits our hope. One could

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26 PL, lx.
read much of what Kant and Rawls have said so far as conflating this difference. For example, one could take Rawls to be arguing that some political end merits our hope because good consequences will result if we were to hold out hope for that end. Although this sort of justification offers us potentially very good reasons to try and make it the case that we hope for such an end, the normative force of such a reason is about the benefits of the attitude of hope rather than the goodness of the desired end itself. To make sense of this worry, let us take a step back from political philosophy and turn our attention to the nature of hope and what makes it fitting.

We should first note that there is a difference between being responsive to bad reasons in favor of some attitude and being responsive to the wrong kind of reasons in favor of that attitude. The fact that your daughter took sixth in her class spelling bee is conceivably a good (albeit perhaps minor) reason to be proud of her. The fact that being a proud parent improves your daughter’s self-esteem and may result in greater achievements down the line is a potentially strong consideration in favor of being proud of her. However, this pragmatic consideration about the effects of your attitude on your daughter’s behavior is at best a good but Wrong Kind of Reason (WKR) to be proud of her. While the attitude of pride may be beneficial in such a case, such benefits do not weigh on whether your daughter’s actions merit your pride.

If you don’t find this distinction persuasive, contrast this scenario with the following: the fact that your daughter has kicked a puppy is clearly a bad reason to be proud of her. The fact that being a proud parent improves your daughter’s self-esteem and may result in

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27 If it turned out that what it is reasonable to hope for, according to Rawls, conflicts with what it is fitting to hope for, this would be an embarrassment for his view. Although it is not necessarily a refutation of his view since it is coherent for Rawls to be offering good but Wrong-Kind-Of-Reasons for the hoping for a prospective end that does not have enough Right Kinds Of Reasons to vouch for the merit of that end.

less animal cruelty in her future is a potentially strong consideration in favor of being proud of her. However strong the considerations about the benefits of your attitude, it seems clear that your daughter’s actions in this case do not merit your pride. Up to some limit, being a good parent may entail being responsive to WKR$s for being proud of one’s children, even when their actions barely merit pride.\textsuperscript{29} However, claiming that you should be responsive to WKR$s in some situations does not change its direction of normative force. The right kinds of reasons for pride should track good-making features of the potential object of pride itself rather than the good-making features of holding the attitude of pride.

So the difference between bad reasons and wrong kinds of reasons is this: That she kicked a puppy is a \textit{bad} Right Kind of Reason (RKR) to be proud of your daughter. The potential improvement of your daughter’s behavior as a result of your pride is a \textit{good} Wrong Kind of Reason (WKR) to be proud of her. WKR$s for pride are at best considerations in favor of attempting to get yourself to be proud of your daughter; however they cannot offer any consideration in favor of evaluating her actions as worthy of your pride.

Similar to the attitude of pride, one can ask whether the attitude of hope is merited in a specific case. The fact that being hopeful leads to good consequences or is a manifestation of good character may turn out to be a WKR for hoping. This is because such considerations may not be appropriately attentive to whether some desired end merits our hope. In order to identify the difference between RKR$s and WKR$s for hoping, let us look more closely at the distinctive constituents of hope:

\textbf{A hopes that P if and only if:}

\textsuperscript{29} This view could be based on aretaic ideals rather than pragmatic considerations that weigh in favor of pride. That is, one could hold this view, not only because being a proud parent has good consequences but just in virtue of what it means to be a good parent. D’Arms and Jacobson argue that moral and pragmatic considerations for holding certain attitudes are often best understood as WKR$s.
(I) A desires that P (call this the ‘desiderative constituent’);

(II) A believes that there is some degree of probability that P will come about (Call this the ‘estimative constituent’);  

(III) A has at some point engaged in some mental imaging of what P would be like if it materialized (call this the ‘effortful constituent’).

The desiderative constituent is fairly straightforward – we hope for states of affairs that we find desirable. The estimative constituent, even stated in such general terms, can still constrain to some extent what it is plausible to hope for. Hope is neither an appropriate attitude when we are certain some desired end will take place nor when we are certain it will fail to transpire. But what about hoping for some desired end that we take to be extremely unlikely? Kant has offered us a suitable way to fill in the outer limits of the estimative constituents of our hopes: We can only hope for some desired end if we believe that the end’s improbability cannot be proven given the theoretical resources and evidence we have at our disposal (from logic, history, scientific inquiry, etc.).

Two fittingness conditions follow from these first two constitutive elements of hope:

**Fittingness Conditions for hope:**

(a) It is not fitting to hope for P if P turns out to be undesirable

(b) It is not fitting to hope for P if it can be shown that P is improbable.

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31 It is important to distinguish hopes from wishes. 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. The difference that I see between these two related cognitive activities is that hoping requires a belief in the possibility of some event transpiring whereas wishing need not -- one can remain agnostic about whether or not some event is possible.
In order to show that a person’s desired end does not merit her hope, we have to show her that either she is mistaken in taking such an end to be desirable or she is mistaken in taking the end to be probable. I posit then that considerations that bear on the desirability and the probability of P can generally be understood as RKR to be hopeful that P. Whereas considerations that weigh in favor of hoping without having anything specific to say about the desirability or probability of P can be understood as WKR to be hopeful.

Although it does not provide a specific fittingness condition for what sorts of hopes are merited, I include the third constituent of hope because I take it to clarify something that is distinctive about the attitude of hope. It seems that our hopes are not just the combination of a desire that-P and a belief that-P-is-not-improbable. Hoping also seems to take some mental effort in a way that possessing background desires and beliefs do not. Luc Bovens describes the following case that highlights this distinctive feature of hoping:

“Sophie shows up late at some party and asks me very self-confidently whether I had been hoping that she would come. Now suppose that I did indeed believe that Sophie might come and that I consider her to be a welcome guest...Still, it seems to me that it would be a lie to say that I had been hoping she would come, unless I had devoted some mental energy on whether she would or would not come to the party – e.g., I had been looking at my clock wondering whether Sophie would still come, I had been turning my head earlier to check whether Sophie was amongst some newly arrived guests, etc.”

Interestingly, Bovens takes the species of mental energy that is indicative of hoping to manifest itself in certain external behaviors. While I don’t think that any particular external behavior is unique of the attitude of hoping, it does seem right to presume that hoping tends to motivate certain types of behavior such as monitoring whether the desired end has transpired and paying attention to potential obstacles that may come in the way of the

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desired end. I take it that people are often pointing to some benefit that is related to this third constituent of hope when they offer justifications about whether to hope for P.

The behavior that is often associated with our hopes and the mental effort that a hope requires has appealed to philosophers who have held the attitude in high esteem. Aquinas argues that hope aids action by focusing the subjects’ efforts and by causing delight in anticipation. Bovens argues that our hopes give us the opportunity to evaluate and restructure our desired ends. These kinds of accounts that praise the value of holding the attitude of hope bring into focus the way in which our hopes can be almost self-fulfilling. Our hopes for some desired end motivate us to try to bring that end about. Thus hoping for some end can make that end more likely by supporting our efforts in bringing it about. These are very good reasons to be hopeful but they do not necessarily provide us with a RKR to hope for a particular end.

Are Kant and Rawls endorsing a WKR to hope in a similar vein? It can appear so, especially since they focus so much on the manner in which our reasonable hopes foster in us the appropriate orientation to the social world around us. The Rawlsian endorsement of reasonable hope could be seen as offering a WKR to hope for justice if the structure of his argument were as follows:

**Argument 1. Moral Reason to Hope:**

1. If we don’t hope for a realistic utopia, then we become either scoundrels or utopian visionaries.

2. It is vicious to be a scoundrel or a visionary.

3. Therefore, we should hope for a realistic utopia in order to avoid viciousness.

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33 Aquinas Ethicus: or, the Moral Teaching of St. Thomas. A Translation of the Principal Portions of the Second part of the Summa Theologica, with Notes by Joseph Rickaby, S.J. (London: Burns and Oates, 1892).
34 Bovens, CITE.
Argument 1 offers us a WKR to hope for a realistic utopia. It bears on the goodness of hoping itself rather than on the merit of the particular utopian vision that Rawls is advancing. However, in the last section, I have tried to show that this is not the best interpretation of Rawls’s view. Rather if we take seriously the idea that philosophy can serve as a type of apologia then the argument works differently:

**Argument 2. Argument by Apologia:**

1. Rawls’s realistic utopia is desirable.
2. No one can show that Rawls’s realistic utopia is sufficiently improbable.
3. Therefore, Rawls’s realistic utopia is one that is worth hoping for. Or another way of putting it is that it is fitting to hope for Rawls’s realistic utopia. (Following 1-2)
4. People are such that when they are presented with the details of a realistic utopia that are convincingly desirable and possible, they will devote some mental energy to imagining that utopia.
5. Therefore, Rawls’s realistic utopia is one that can cultivate the appropriate hopes in us. These are the sorts of hopes that help us avoid becoming scoundrels or visionaries. (Following 3-4)

If this second argument is the appropriate interpretation of Rawls’s aims in offering a realistic utopia, then it could be established that although Rawls claims that our reasonable hopes can motivate us to act rightly, he does not argue that such hopes are justified because they do so. The hopes themselves are justified because the vision of justice that Rawls presents is one that is desirable on its own merits and for which there is insufficient evidence to prove its improbability. The fact that Rawls believes a realistic utopia can guard against
untoward and implausible hopes is an attractive feature of his view rather than its justification.

I have said very little so far in defense of premise 1. Much of Rawls’s philosophical energy was devoted to justifying the desirability of his own conception of justice and so defending the premise is beyond the scope of this paper. However, I do wish to point out ways in which Rawls illustrates how the desirability of a politically utopian conception can be contested. Such a dispute rests on what counts as good or bad RKR s to hope for certain possibilities. I will turn to this discussion in the next section.

But before doing so, a note on the possible uses of WKR s in vindicating reasonable hope. I have articulated why the structure of apologia relies on the adequacy of premise 2 as the standard for what it is appropriate to hope for. Some will argue that premise 2 is inadequate in defending the reasonability of one’s hopes. To show that others cannot prove one’s hopes improbability is not the same as demonstrating the hopes’ likelihood. Such pessimistic critics could say that it is best to be agnostic about whether some conception of justice is possible when evidence points in both directions.

To respond to such critics, Rawls may appropriately make use of WKR s that highlight the motivating power of hope for bringing about just ends. WKR s in defense of hope are appropriate in responding to such challenges when we think about the practice of political philosophy as educative of a public rather than merely a theoretical exercise of figuring out the correct view. In other words, having established the fittingness of a hope, WKR s can serve two functions. First, they can give us reason to be motivated to persuade others to share our hopes. Second, they could serve as justificatory tie-breakers for convincing those who accept the desirability of a view and accept that the impossibility of the view cannot be proven but who still are trepidatious about hoping for an ideal that they
are not assured will come about. I will return to these more pragmatic considerations in favor of a hopeful conception of justice in the final section of the paper.

§3. Marx’s Unfitting 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 unworthy for normative reasons. 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 utopia are often overly simplified as generally providing merely an
ideal for which we can realistically hope. As we shall soon see however 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. 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.

Marx found the absence of the concern for justice among citizens to be an attractive feature of his theory. In response to this, Rawls implores, “We should ask ourselves whether this is indeed an attractive feature?” 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 in its conception and as a practical matter. Practically speaking, it is undesirable because the stability of just institutions. According to Rawls, is

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36 Ibid.
37 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.
38 LHPP, p. 371.
dependent on the sense of justice of citizens, since institutions will not come about or be 
maintained on their own. In this way, a Marxist society would be unfeasible according to 
Rawls – even if we can achieve such institutions, they would not last long without being 
constantly reinforced and maintained by members of the society who have a sense of justice.

On a deeper level, however, to hope for the absence of citizens’ sense of justice is 
also undesirable in conception on ethical 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.” In this way, not only is the 
content of Marx’s hope impractical it is also ethically unreasonable because it hopes for a 
future in which people’s sense of justice will not need to be developed and respected. It is 
particularly an ethically 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 reasonable hope. Is 
the absence of coercive force, for instance, a reasonable hope? Or the absence of all

39 LHPP, 372.
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 unjustifiable (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 is for something that on closer examination is undesirable. Marx’s hope that equality is possible without the need for members of society to have a sense of justice seems to be such a case according to Rawls.

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 offer an undesirable vision of the ends of society and the value of 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 up to this point has presented us with a defense of theories that cultivate our reasonable hopes as well as revealed the faults of a political theories that engenders unreasonable hope in us. But what about a theory of justice that neither supports nor undermines one’s hopes? 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 hard question.

§4. 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.\(^{40}\) Kant’s understanding of 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.\(^{41}\) This is a significant difference between the two

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\(^{40}\) 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 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 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?”

\(^{41}\) 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
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 actually 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 Jean-Jacques Rousseau in which a just state may no longer be achievable. Rousseau takes humankind to be good by nature and holds that it is contemporary society that depraves us and makes us miserable.42 Because of this he argues that the starting point of thinking about justice is to take “men as they are and laws as they might be.”43 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 descendants) 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.44

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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. 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 reasonably wish for justice to transpire, even if hoping for it is out of the question. 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

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45 I thank David Estlund for pushing me on this point.
non-ideal 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.46

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.47 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.48 Therefore, anticipation is not only a mental exercise, but can itself be efficacious, though its efficacy cannot be guaranteed.

47 Ibid. p. 70.
48 Ibid. p. 72.
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 theorizing. 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. We need no further reason for why these people matter to us. The very practice of theorizing about them may turn out to have some affect on the lives they will lead.

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.

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49 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.

50 The same cannot be said about subjects of the imaginative sort of political philosophy. I have already enumerated how imaginative political theories can be of value; however, I take it that an important component of such projects must be a further story of why such a conception of justice (that is not one that is possible for us or for our future) matters. In this way political philosophy that is anticipatory has at least one advantage over imaginative political philosophy; namely, it has its practical relevance built into its subject matter.
However, I think 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 to political philosophy 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.\textsuperscript{51} When we are thinking about the aims of political philosophy in offering reasonable hope from this perspective, what may have previously been thought of as WKRs to hope for some end turn out to be appropriate justifications for \textit{trying to elicit the attitude of hope for that end} within the philosophical community.

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.”\textsuperscript{52} 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

\textsuperscript{51} Rawls, LHPP, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{52} Rawls, LP, lxi.
time had past.”\textsuperscript{53} This lack of hope, on Rawls’s perspective, paved the way for the atrocities of the Holocaust.

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. And it 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.”\textsuperscript{54} 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 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.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{54} LOP, 128.