

IS THERE PLACE FOR HAPPINESS? MAN BETWEEN FALLIBILITY AND CAPABILITY IN P. RICOEUR

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This paper aims to investigate the course of Ricoeurian thought in order to try to find a “place” for happiness in the human condition. Ricoeur started his philosophical work investigating the horizon of fallibility typical of man in his dejected situation, trying to analyse in a phenomenological way the limits of the cogito in its constitutive impossibility to achieve a sort of auto-transparency and self-consciousness. *The Philosophy of the Will* is the great attempt Ricoeur did to describe this situation by dividing his course into three main parts: a “phenomenology of the voluntary and the involuntary”, a “symbolic of evil” and a “poetic of freedom”. As it is well known he published only the first two parts of this young and ambitious project stopped by the impossibility to achieve the adequate language to express the poetic of freedom into the philosophical limits of language.

In this sense the Ricoeurian analysis concerning the possibility to overcome the man’s condition of fallibility was deviated into a long course through the human sciences, with a long work of confrontation between the multiple methods which give the possibility of knowing man’s freedom through his objectivation in actions and texts. Through this long way Ricoeur became able to convert his original idea of man’s fallibility into the idea of capability. His phenomenology of capable man begins to be a centre of interest since *Oneself as Another* – where Ricoeur presents the idea of an ipseity able to testify of its being through its capability of speaking, acting, narrating and being responsible – until his last work on *The Course of Recognition*. Here, in particular, the recognition of human capabilities give rise to the conflict intended as a semi-permanent status of the human condition. For Ricoeur, on the same stream of Hegel in this case, the human condition is fully interwoven of conflict because of the need of recognition that every man has inasmuch he is “capable” and consequently “powerful”.

So it seems that human life is like a pendulum which swings between fallibility and conflict – just to recall a notorious Schopenhauerian quote – in which freedom is always connected to a responsibility which makes us guilty of our weaknesses and conflict. So here it is the question: Is there place for happiness? Is there place for a freedom finally freed from its conflictual dark side? Is there the possibility of a fully realised freedom in which man can enjoy his capabilities without being in conflict?

It is possible to find a solution to this question in three elements of Ricoeurian thought which allude to a possible “poetic of freedom” never explicitly presented in his work but sometimes sketched in many parts of his researches. The first trace of happiness can be found in the final part of his *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary* where he speaks about the “contentment” as a form of reconciliation with our finite condition. Another opportunity of happiness can be found in the last part of *The Rule of Metaphor* where he embraces the Heideggerian idea of a “poetic thinking” where can be renewed the idea of an aesthetic resurrection of thought rediscovered in its dwelling in the cradle of being itself. Finally the third “place” for happiness can be found in the evangelical dimension of love, intended as *agape*, a sacred “gift” of joy that overcomes every conflict and founds the permanent basis of every human relationship.