Myth, Intermediacy, and Transcendence in Paul Ricoeur’s Concept of Fallibility

CORNELIU C. SIMUȚ

Emanuel University

ABSTRACT. This article presents Ricoeur’s attempt to pass from a theoretical understanding of human fallibility to a more pragmatic approach which is supposed to explain the reality of man’s capacity to choose evil. Man is fallible because he lives as a finite being in contrast with the infinitude of God. As God’s infinitude and ontology cannot be grasped by man, it seems more logical to discuss the existence of man’s fallibility as intermediacy between various levels of human finitude rather than making reference to God’s infinitude. Thus, the infinitude of god should actually be conceived in terms of man’s finitude, which also leads to the dramatic redefinition of the idea of transcendence. Ricoeur can work with the concept of transcendence for as long as transcendence points to human realities, which can be properly assessed and comprehended only by philosophy. Religion and theology cannot explain man’s reality as a fallible being in a global way; this is why, resorting to philosophy should fix this problem because, in Ricoeur, it is only philosophy which can understand the complexity of the human being in its swinging between finitude and infinitude.

KEY WORDS: myth, disproportion, intermediacy, fallibility, transcendence

From Myth to Non-Coincidence and Disproportion

Ricoeur is utterly concerned to show that fallibility can be discussed primarily as a concept.¹ The best possibility he finds for this task is the appeal to pure reflection, which he defines as a “way of understanding and being understood” which is not attainable by means of “image, symbol or myth”. This approach

¹ Henry Isaac Venema, Identifying Selfhood, 54.
is crucial for Ricoeur because without the mediation of imagery, symbolism and mythology, pure reflection discloses a reality which belongs to the essential constitution of the human being. In this sense, fallibility is not a mere concept but also a reality which presents the fragility of the human being as well as its characteristic of being subject to commit erroneous actions in all respects. In attaching fallibility as a concept to the possibility of pure reflection, Ricoeur wants to make sure that the sum of the human being’s most fundamental features includes fallibility as one of man’s essential characteristics. This is Ricoeur’s explanation of fallibility as a concept:

In maintaining that fallibility is a concept, I am presupposing at the outset that pure reflection—that is, a way of understanding and being understood that does not come through image, symbol, or myth—can reach a certain threshold of intelligibility where the possibility of evil appears inscribed in the innermost structure of human reality. The idea that man is by nature fragile and liable to err is [...] an idea wholly accessible to pure reflection; it designates a characteristic of man’s being.²

This particular way of approaching fallibility as a prominent part of man’s structure, Ricoeur comes closer to traditional Christianity which presents man’s fallibility—concretized by means of the idea of sin—as an innate distinctiveness of human nature. Man is born fallible and will definitely stay fallible for the rest of his life. There is no doubt that in this very specific sense Ricoeur’s philosophy could agree with traditional Christian theology. There is, however, a fundamental difference between traditional Christianity and Ricoeur’s apprehension of fallibility which is given by the particular perspective on fallibility adopted by traditional Christianity on the one hand, and Ricoeur on the other. While Ricoeur sees fallibility as an essential characteristic of man’s human being in its natural state, tra-

² Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, xlx.
ditional Christian theology approaches fallibility as inner to man’s inner constitution after the event of Adam’s fall. When it comes to approaching the fall, Ricoeur parts ways with traditional Christianity for which the fall was an actual and historical event. This means that man’s natural constitution had certain characteristics prior to the fall and other characteristics after the fall. So the fall functions as a rupture in man’s natural constitution, which is totally changed after the event of the fall. It is quite evident that Ricoeur cannot accept such a breach in man’s natural structure and his conviction is informed by his perception of the fall as a non-event. If the fall is a non-event, it transcends the biological level of man’s existence in the sense that it does not disrupt man’s life within history as some sort of cataclysmic interruption of his natural state. There is no point in history when man was different from what he is in the present, so whatever fall describes is categorically not a historical fact but something which goes beyond this particular level of man’s life. Therefore, it is logical to presume that the fall should be approached in a totally different way which is congruous with Ricoeur’s conviction that man’s nature has been constantly the same throughout history. This is why Ricoeur sees the fall as a myth and the myth is structurally a non-event. The myth may present a certain event followed by subsequent events which appear to be historical but they are essentially non-historical, so they cannot be conceived as having been part of the actual development of history as an intricate web of events. Myth is part of history insofar as man, which conceives it, is part of history but it also transcends history because its core structure is separated from the reality and possibility of historical events. So in Ricoeur the fall presents us the reality of fallibility as a non-event but rather as a concept which is available to pure reflection.

To be sure, fallibility is an ontological feature of humanity so humanity cannot be conceived without the possibility as well as
Likewise, fallibility cannot escape any discourse about humanity because it is contained by the reality of man’s natural constitution. Fallibility, however, cannot be clearly presented unless it proves empirically that something is wrong with the human being. How can we know that something is wrong with the human being if the human being is characterized by fallibility as structurally imbedded within itself? We know that something is wrong and fallibility can be seen as an innate possibility of man’s natural constitution if man is seen to exist in some sort of a “non-coincidence” with himself. For Ricoeur, this non-coincidence of man with himself appears as a certain disproportion which is the very reason or cause of fallibility. Thus, fallibility shows that man’s existence is characterized by disproportion or non-coincidence which is at the end of the day an ontological constituent of man’s natural state. It follows that it is most natural for man to be fallible or characterized by fallibility which presents man as a complex being, a being which exists in such a way that he appears at the same time in a position of showing utter greatness but also fundamental nothingness.

But how can this idea of man’s fallibility be made clear? We shall have to be prepared to formulate a series of approaches that, although partial, will in each case grasp a global disposition of human reality (or the condition) in which this ontological characteristic is inscribed. [...] this global disposition consists in a certain non-coincidence of man with himself: this “disproportion” of self to self would be the ratio of fallibility. “I should not be surprised” if evil has entered the world with

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3 Henry Isaac Venema, *Identifying Selfhood*, 41.
4 See David M. Rasmussen, *Symbol and Interpretation*, 43.
5 Andrew Cutrofello, *Continental Philosophy*, 255.
6 See also John Wall, *Moral Creativity*, 29.
7 For details about man’s complexity and how it should be approached as far as Ricoeur is concerned, see Theodoor Marius van Leeuwen, *The Surplus of Meaning*, 38.
man, for he is the only reality that presents this unstable ontological constitution of being greater and lesser than himself.\textsuperscript{8}

In order to make a clear case in favor of fallibility, Ricoeur is eager to explain what he means by disproportion.\textsuperscript{9} It is important not to forget that disproportion proves fallibility so fallibility is seen in disproportion.\textsuperscript{10} When applied to human reality, it is crucial to know where disproportion can be sought and how it can be identified. Disproportion can be investigated by means of the Cartesian paradox of finite-infinite but Ricoeur is not very happy with this approach to fallibility. The reason for his discontent is the fact that the paradox of finite-infinite can present fallibility as an ontological characteristic of man which is based on the concept of intermediacy.\textsuperscript{11} If the disproportion of fallibility is assessed from the perspective of the intermediacy between finitude and infinitude,\textsuperscript{12} then we need a reference point which is totally transcendent to humanity and even to its realm of existence. It is quite natural to understand the human being as characterized by finitude in the sense that it is finite and limited with respect to its own existence; the problem though appears when we have to define human finitude by comparison to infinitude. If finitude is utterly human as man’s core structural essence, the infinitude is the opposite reality which describes man in opposition to what he is in his natural state. Therefore, man should be seen as finite in opposition to a reality which exists beyond his finite realm of existence. In other words, human finitude should be described in opposition to a non-human reality which cannot be other than the reality of God—understood as utterly transcendent to man and his existential as well as historical reality. If disproportion is understood by means of the intermediacy between man’s finitude and

\textsuperscript{8} Ricoeur, \textit{Fallible Man}, 1.
\textsuperscript{9} See also Kevin J. Vanhoozer, \textit{Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur}, 21.
\textsuperscript{10} Karl Simms, \textit{Paul Ricoeur}, 16.
\textsuperscript{11} Also check Paul Varo Martinson, \textit{A Theology of World Religions}, 107.
\textsuperscript{12} Dan R. Stiver, \textit{Theology after Ricoeur}, 26.
God’s infinitude, then—Ricoeur believes—we find ourselves in a totally misleading position.

**Fallibility as Intermediacy**

Why is it misleading to judge fallibility by means of the disproportion between finitude and infinitude? Primarily because the dialectics between finitude and infinitude presuppose the idea of intermediacy between finitude and infinitude as well as the idea of finitude as totally opposed to infinitude. If man is finite, then his inner constitution and being is characterized by finitude; to be sure, man is finitude when it comes to define his natural state. By opposition, the idea of infinitude presupposes the reverse of finitude and, as finitude is represented by means of the being of man, then it follows that infinitude is also represented by means of the idea of being. This being though is not finite but infinite, so this is the classic argument for the existence of God. So we have the finitude of man and the infinitude of God in a relationship of disproportion because man is finite not only in relationship to God but also in relationship to his realm of existence as created by God. Ricoeur is very uncomfortable with this approach because it introduces the idea of “ontological locality” which places man within a reality that is characterized by the concept of “between”. Man is fallible because he can be understood based on the disproportion between his own finitude and God’s infinitude:

We are certainly not in a position to deal directly with this ontological characteristic of man, for the idea of intermediacy that is implied in the idea of disproportion is also very misleading. For to say that man is situated between being and nothingness is already to treat human reality as a region, an ontological locality, or a place lodged between other places. Now, this schema of intercalation is extremely deceptive: it tempts us to treat man as an object whose place is fixed by its relation to other realities that are more

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or less complex, intelligent, and independent than man. Man is not intermediate because he is between angel and animal; he is intermediate within himself, within his selves. He is intermediate because he is a mixture, and a mixture because he brings about mediations. His ontological characteristic of being-intermediate consists precisely in that his act of existing is the very act of bringing about mediations between all the modalities and all the levels of reality within him and outside him.\textsuperscript{14}

It seems that Ricoeur dismisses this perspective because the idea of “between” as applied to man’s finitude in opposition to God’s finitude confers an ontological status not only to the reality of man\textsuperscript{15}—which is rather obvious—but also to the reality of God.\textsuperscript{16} Therefore, Ricoeur appears to experience a certain feeling of unease because of the possibility of seeing God in ontological terms which pushes man to a definition in opposition to an ontology of total transcendence. Ricoeur is not willing to define man as well as man’s fallibility—and finitude—by means of its opposition to the total transcendence of God’s infinitude.

Such an enterprise would cause his exegetical hermeneutics of the myth—of the fall—and the resulting symbolism of evil to break down completely because myth is the very element which disrupts the intermediacy between the finite ontology of humanity and the infinite, total and absolute ontology of God.\textsuperscript{17} Myth actually disannuls the total transcendence of God and restricts the idea of transcendence to the finite reality of man. Ricoeur seeks to retain the idea of intermediacy as well as the accompanying concept of disproportion but not as applied to the opposition between man’s finite reality and the ontology of

\textsuperscript{14} Ricoeur, \textit{Fallible Man}, 2.

\textsuperscript{15} For details about human reality in Ricoeur, see David Wood, \textit{On Paul Ricoeur}, 48-50.

\textsuperscript{16} See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, \textit{Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur}, 211.

\textsuperscript{17} Check also Paul Gifford, \textit{Love, Desire and Transcendence in French Literature}, 45-48.
God’s total transcendence but between realities which belong to man’s immanent reality both internal and external. Therefore, man does not mediate between levels of reality which can exclude his own reality; he mediates between levels of reality which not only include his own reality but also define his own reality. To put it in plain words, man mediates between himself and other people but also between himself and his own self.

There seems to be another reason why Ricoeur resents the idea of intermediacy if applied to man’s finite reality—which defines his fallibility—in opposition to the ontology of God’s total transcendence and infinitude. If God is ontologically real, it means that man must be defined in opposition to God. Whatever God is, man is not or whatever God is in his infinitude man is in his finitude, which automatically presuppose a reversed definition. For instance, if God is immortal in his infinitude, man is immortal in his finitude which automatically means that his immortality should be defined in terms of finitude; at the end of the day, man’s immortality is nothing by mortality defined from the perspective of God’s immortality. Likewise, if God is infallible in his infinitude, man is infallible in his finitude which actually means that he is fallible as opposed to God’s totally transcendent infallibility. The idea of disproportion between the ontology of man and the ontology of God is rather evident but what seems to concern Ricoeur is not as much the idea of disproportion but rather the concept of intermediacy. If God is totally transcendent, then it follows that his ontology is utterly opposed to man’s ontology. Thus, if the idea of intermediacy is applied to the opposing realities of God and man, man is totally incapable to function as intermediary between himself and God. The intermediacy is not between man and God because man cannot apply this intermediacy by himself because of his finitude which cannot find access to God’s infinitude; the intermediacy is rather between God and man, so it is God who applies the intermediacy between himself and man because his infinitude can always find access to man’s finitude. In the best of cases, the idea of intermediacy as applied
to man can only be passive because the active side of it belongs to God. Man’s intermediacy is passive because he cannot have access to God’s infinite ontology; only God can have access to man’s finite ontology so, in the end, intermediacy is more an action of God rather than a state which defines man.

Ricoeur simply cannot accept such a conclusion, so his idea of intermediacy focuses exclusively on man’s ontology as defined by means of translating myths into symbols which can develop different meanings in order to find relevant ways to explain humanity. 18 This way, he cancels the ontology of God and promotes the ontology of man, so the intermediacy—and the accompanying idea of disproportion—should be tackled exclusively from the perspective of man with view to realities which not only encompass man’s own reality but also exist within man’s own reality. Therefore, the idea of intermediacy can achieve the full measure of man’s active involvement; 19 man in himself is the state of intermediacy between all levels of human existence—internal and external—so it is no longer God who actively mediates his relationship to man but it is man who mediates his existence within the finitude of his immanent ontology. 20 In other words, Ricoeur admits the existence of various levels of reality within man and outside man but all these levels of reality are mediated by man. 21 To be sure, the possibility of fallibility as defined by disproportion—and intermediacy—has nothing to do with the idea of God’s ontology of total transcendence but only with man’s finitude as given by his multifaceted historical existence and experience. 22

18 Jeffrey W. Robbins, Between Faith and Thought, 104
20 For further insights into Ricoeur’s idea of mediation, see David Wood, On Paul Ricoeur, 26-27.
21 For details, see Domenico Jervolino, “Paul Ricoeur and Hermeneutic Phenomenology”, in Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (ed.), Phenomenology World-Wide, 394.
22 John Wall, Moral Creativity, 29.
Redefining Transcendence

The notion of transcendence is crucial for Ricoeur when it comes to define the intermediacy of man from the perspective of the disproportion between the finite and the infinite.\(^{23}\) Finitude and infinitude should be linked to transcendence but we must be very careful when we identify what we mean by transcendence.\(^{24}\) As shown before, Ricoeur is more than willing to work with the idea of transcendence as long as transcendence has nothing to do with God’s ontology. If we accept that God is ontologically real, so he has an existence of his own which is active beyond the realm of man’s existence, then the idea of transcendence tends to define God rather than man. This is an equation which cannot be accepted as far as Ricoeur is concerned, so he carefully redefines the idea of transcendence by means of the refinement of mythology through symbolism. Therefore, if the idea of God is encapsulated within mythology, then the reality of God’s ontology fades away in favor of man’s ontology.\(^{25}\) The idea of transcendence can still be retained but it no longer underlines the infinitude of God’s ontology; it only highlights the reality of man’s ontology. So, it is no longer God who is transcendent but man.\(^{26}\) In other words, we should not conceive transcendence with reference to God who exists beyond the finitude of man but rather with reference to man who transcends his own finitude. This is clearly a point of contrast between Ricoeur and traditional Christianity because the total transcendence of God’s ontology is the stronghold of traditional Christian theology. Thus, God is transcendent, infinite and infallible and it is this particular definition of God that subsequently informs the image of man. Whatever man is in his historical reality should be defined in accordance with God’s

\(^{23}\) For details about transcendence and immanence in Ricoeur, see Richard L. Lanigan, *Speaking and Semiology*, 93.
\(^{24}\) Scott Lash, *Another Modernity, a Different Rationality*, 158.
\(^{25}\) See also Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, 132.
absolute transcendence. This results into some sort of a reverse definition of man which while retaining the characteristics of God’s absolute transcendence—infinitude for instance—it still posits them by contrast with God, so we can speak of man as being infinite but only in terms of his finite existence. In other words, man’s transcendence—as presented by Ricoeur—is limited because man’s nature is essentially finite. Here is what Ricoeur has to say about the way we should understand the idea of transcendence with reference to man:

The question is whether man’s transcendence is merely transcendence of finitude or whether the converse is not something of equal importance: as will be seen, man appears to be no less discourse than perspective, no less a demand for totality than a limited nature, no less love than desire. The interpretation of the paradox beginning with finitude does not seem to us to have any privilege over the opposed interpretation. According to the latter, man is infinitude, and finitude is a sign that points to the restricted nature of this infinitude; conversely, infinitude is a sign of the transcending of finitude. Man is no less destined to unlimited rationality, to totality, and beatitude than he is limited to a perspective, consigned to death, and riveted by desire. Our working hypothesis concerning the paradox of the finite-infinite implies that we must speak of infinitude as much as of human finitude. The full recognition of this polarity is essential to the elaboration of the concepts of intermediacy, disproportion, and fallibility, the interconnections of which we have indicated in moving from the last to the first of these concepts.27

So unlike in traditional Christianity, Ricoeur attributes the idea of transcendence exclusively to the human being. Man is transcendent despite his finitude but also because his finitude. This means that man is capable of nurturing feelings which seem to contradict his limited natural constitution while at the same time he displays these feelings as a result of his awareness

27 Ricoeur, Fallible Man, 3-4.
about his limitations. For instance, as a limited being, man should be controlled by desires—which are not commendable by definition—but despite his finitude, man is still capable of exhibiting feelings of deep love. Man’s love, as opposite to desire, is a proof of his transcendence because love rises above his instinctual cravings.\textsuperscript{28} The human being manifests love in spite of what he is by nature but also because he is fully aware of his finitude. This is why man purposefully shows love as an attempt to go beyond the limits of his own end in death.\textsuperscript{29} It is very possible that—according to Ricoeur’s understanding of human transcendence—man should perceive love as a means to continue his influence beyond the limits of his actual existence or maybe he just enjoys the experience of transcending his own natural instincts during the actual span of his life; whatever the explanation, Ricoeur is convinced that transcendence is an inner quality of the human being which—despite its restricted nature because of man’s finitude—offers a positive definition of fallibility.\textsuperscript{30}

It becomes evident therefore that fallibility must be discussed—according to Ricoeur—from the perspective of the human being alone. Fallibility may be a concept which presents a human reality but we cannot investigate the reality of human fallibility by remaining stuck to its conceptual framework. Ricoeur’s methodology of investigating fallibility is to acknowledge the concept but proceed from the reality of the human being and especially from its polarity between finitude and infintude. Man is being of utmost complexity and his complexity cannot be properly assessed unless the totality of his humanity is both acknowledged and accepted. In order to understand human fallibility, Ricoeur suggests that we should promote a wholistic view of man, a perspective which integrates the entire complexity of humanity in general as well as of the human be-

\textsuperscript{28} Karl Simms, \textit{Paul Ricoeur}, 19.
\textsuperscript{29} Theodoor Marius van Leeuwen, \textit{The Surplus of Meaning}, 188.
\textsuperscript{30} Cf. David M. Rasmussen, \textit{Symbol and Interpretation}, 43.
ing in particular. Thus, it is not sufficient to research the concept of fallibility as the possibility of evil seen as deeply imbedded in our human nature; what we should do is investigate man in his entirety, complexity and existence with particular attention to the intermediacy between his finitude and infinitude. So it is the totality of humanity, which includes man’s finitude and infinitude in relationship to himself and other humans that should offer a comprehensive assessment of man’s fallibility. Here is what Ricoeur has to say about fallibility as produced by the global view of humanity:

The question is how to begin. How can we determine the point of departure in a philosophical anthropology placed under the guiding idea of fallibility? We know only that we cannot start from a simple term, but must rather start from the composite itself, from the finite-infinite relation. Thus it is necessary to start from the whole of man, by which I mean from the global view of his non-coincidence with himself, his disproportion, and the mediation he brings about in existing. But is it not likely that this global view would exclude all progression and logical sequence? There remains the possibility that progress and order might develop in the course of a series of viewpoints or approaches that would in each case be a viewpoint on and approach to the totality.

It is important to realize that, for Ricoeur, this global perspective on the totality of humanity with view to a definition of fallibility can be achieved only by philosophy. The philosophical comprehension of fallibility however cannot be produced exclusively based on philosophical sources. Actually, Ricoeur admits that philosophy is, in a way, the second—though fundamental—step to be taken in order to define fallibility. The first step in assessing fallibility is not taken by philosophy but by non-philosophy, which can be theology and/or religion in general. With respect to fallibility, philosophy must offer compre-

hension but this philosophical comprehension is based on a non-philosophical—namely theological and/or religious—precomprehension.33 Philosophy is reflection, non-philosophy is an enterprise which precedes reflection.34 So, in order to understand fallibility, we must seek the non-philosophical precomprehension of humanity—given by theology and religion—and then, by means of reflection, achieve the philosophical comprehension which eventually illuminates man’s reality as fallible being. At this point, the fundamental question is where can the non-philosophical precomprehension be actually found? As far as Ricoeur is concerned, the non-philosophical precomprehension of man’s fallibility can and should be found in what he calls the patheticalness of misery (pathétique de la misère).35 Ricoeur explains that this patheticalness is actually a precomprehension in itself because it makes man understanding himself as miserable. In other words, the non-philosophical precomprehension of fallibility is based on man’s realization that his existence is characterized by misery:36

Now, if the development of thought in a philosophical anthropology never consists in going from the simple to the complex, but always moves within the totality itself, this can only be a development in the philosophical elucidation of the global view. This totality, therefore, must first be given in some way prior to philosophy, in a precomprehension that lends itself to reflection. Consequently, philosophy has to proceed as a second-order elucidation of a nebula of meaning that at first has a prephilosophical character. This means that we must completely dissociate the idea of method in philosophy from the idea of a starting point. Philosophy does not start anything independently: supported by the non-philosophical, it derives its existence from the substance of what has already been understood prior to reflection. However, if philosophy is not a radical beginning with regard to its sources, it

33 Don Ihde, Hermeneutic Phenomenology, 87.
34 Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Biblical Narratives in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, 58.
35 Theodoor Marius van Leeuwen, The Surplus of Meaning, 39.
36 See also Henry Isaac Venema, Identifying Selfhood, 57.
may be one with regard to its method. Thus, through this idea of a
difference of potential between the non-philosophical precompre-
hension and the methodical beginning of elucidation, we are
brought closer to a well-defined working hypothesis. But where
should we look for the precomprehension of fallible man? In the
*pathétique* of “misery”. This pathos is, as it were, the matrix of any
philosophy that makes disproportion and intermediacy the ontic
characteristic of man. Yet it is necessary to take this pathos at its
highest point of perfection. Even though it is prephilosophical, this
*pathétique* is precomprehension, and it is that insofar as it is perfect
speech, perfect in its order and on its level. Accordingly, we shall
look for some of those excellent expressions which tell of man’s
precomprehension of himself as “miserable”.\(^37\)

The bottom line for Ricoeur in assessing fallibility is the recog-
nition of man’s ontological characteristics based on the non-
philosophical precomprehension of fallibility which presents
man as a being that acknowledges its own misery. Although
Ricoeur does not elaborate on this particular aspect, it should be
stressed that the non-philosophical precomprehension of falli-
bility can be given my theological and religious mythology. In
other words, theology and religion produce myths which pic-
ture man as a being of utmost misery. From this point onwards,
thology and religion cease to explain human fallibility in a
global way, so we need to resort to philosophical discourse in
order to obtain a philosophical comprehension of human falli-
bility. So it is not philosophy which begins the task to unveil the
depths of man’s fallibility; this resides in the pre-philosophical
endeavors of theology and religion. What philosophy does is
not to begin but rather to begin again the assessment of human
fallibility from the pre-philosophical foundation offered by the-
ology and religion. In other words, we need to pursue a genu-
inely philosophical anthropology, which globally takes into ac-
count man’s complex disproportion and non-coincidence

\(^37\) Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, 4.
with himself due to the polarity of finitude and infinitude. To conclude, the methodology to be followed with view to defining human fallibility includes pre-philosophical and philosophical approaches to man’s misery in order to portray a global perspective on his existence which swings between finitude and infinitude, a perspective that necessarily goes all the way from pure reflection to total comprehension.

Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, 5-6.