Editors’ Introduction

As several of the authors included in this special issue of *Critical Horizons* remark, social hope is a neglected theme in political philosophy. It is true that for some time now many political philosophers and critical social theorists have been concerned with the rational justification of the norms they presumably hope will one day prevail in society: ideals such as equality, liberal justice, cosmopolitanism and so forth. It is also true that research in utopian studies has thrived in recent years, so that we now have a richer and more nuanced understanding of the concept of utopia and its ongoing relevance for political thought. But neither mainstream normative political theory nor the more historically oriented utopian research deals explicitly with the problematic of social hope as such. The dominant normative paradigm focuses on the justification of principles and values without concerning itself with the grounds for hoping that the principles and values that *ought* to govern social life actually *will* one day do so. And while utopian studies broadens our conception of how the good society might look, and so informs us of the nature of at least utopian hope, it does so in the main without a concern for social hope more generally, and without really attending to what it is that *entitles* us to such hope. Contemporary political philosophy is thus marked by a lack of reflection on social hope that the papers included in this volume go some way to correct.

The problematic of social hope is in the first instance a matter of defining hope adequately, so it is appropriate that the volume should begin with an attempt at a philosophical clarification of the concept of hope. In his paper “Analysing Hope”, Nicholas H. Smith seeks to recast insights arising from those classical philosophical analyses of hope that distinguish hope’s cognitive and conative dimensions within a phenomenological framework that foregrounds the anticipatory character of hoping. This is done with a view to clarifying the senses in which hope is subject to a norm of responsibility, an issue that emerges as central to the problematic of social hope as it is investigated throughout this volume. Vincent Geoghegan’s contribution is also concerned with the meaning of hope, but his focus is less on the semantics of hope (as Smith’s is) than on the hermeneutics
Editors’ Introduction

of the central Western mythological figure of hope: Pandora. In the course of a careful reconstruction of the original Hesiodic myth and its subsequent interpretations, Geoghegan brings out the complexity of hope’s significance and its intimate connection to fundamental metaphysical issues of good and evil. Geoghegan adds weight to the emerging post-secular current of thought by arguing that the Pandora myth, together with the myth of Prometheus, contain insights that point to a need to rethink the relation between religion and philosophy, and in particular those philosophical discourses informed by utopianism. Ruth Levitas shares Geoghegan’s commitment to an educated, re-energized utopianism, but rather than opening up a way of retrieving transcendent or non-secular sources of hope for this end, she is more concerned in her paper “Pragmatism, Utopia and Anti-Utopia” with addressing the threat posed by self-styled “pragmatic” or “realistic” utopians, whatever they say about religion. For Levitas, utopianism as the education of hope is a matter of sustaining openness to the possibilities of the future in a way that orients one practically in the present to progressive social change. By this standard, Levitas argues, Richard Rorty’s avowedly “pragmatist” utopianism compares unfavourably with the disavowed utopianism of Roberto Unger.

Levitas’s negative assessment of Rorty’s credentials as a utopian is based primarily on Rorty’s polemical and political writings. Drawing more on Rorty’s metaphilosophical work, Shane O’Neill argues for a more positive evaluation. For while Rorty’s strictures on philosophical anthropology and procedural universalism may be unwarranted, in O’Neill’s view, Rorty’s pragmatism has the decisive merit of making the argumentative exchange of democratic citizens accountable to no external higher authority. For O’Neill, this is a crucial and necessary philosophical move to make in the plural, global context of criticism we find ourselves in today. For in such a context, the education of social hope becomes a matter of submitting particular hopes to processes of public justification. Democratic criticism is thus the context-specific form in which philosophical reason can educate social hope in a global, pluralist age. But if hope needs democracy for its education, then, as Andrew Norris argues powerfully in his contribution to the volume, democracy needs hope for its fulfilment. In a wide-ranging discussion that interweaves themes from the Pandora myth with a critique of Rorty’s writings on American patriotism, Norris identifies a specifically political problem of hope that has to do not so much with hope under its cognitive aspect – which is tested in practices of public justification – as with hope under its conative aspect, namely the formation of a collective desire on the part of democratic citizens “to become who we are”. Norris then draws attention to ways in which dark feelings of disappointment, frustration and despair are inseparably bound up with democratic political hope. The dialectic of hope and evil broached here is also taken up by Norman Geras in his reflections on “Social Hope and State Lawlessness”. Utopian hope, Geras points out, by no means exhausts the realm
of social hope: there is also the matter of what hope we can have that states will be prevented from perpetrating all sorts of injustices, crimes and human rights abuses on a massive scale. Hope for the potential victims of state-lawlessness, Geras argues, rests on an internationally established right of humanitarian intervention embodying the principle that each individual human being is “not disentitled to the protection of humanity”.

We have also included reviews of some recent books that in one way or another engage with the problematic of social hope.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge generous support for the project of which this volume is the culmination from Queen’s University Belfast and Macquarie University in Sydney.

Nicholas H. Smith
Shane O’Neill