



A Critical Analysis of “Radical Hope” versus “Optimism” in Terry Eagleton’s Thought

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Abstract: This research undertakes a critical investigation of the ontological distinction between "Hope" and "Optimism" within the intellectual framework of Terry Eagleton. The central problem concerns the critique of the ideology of optimism as a neoliberal construct—one that, by denying the "Tragic" and erasing historical memory, reproduces subjective passivity in the face of structural catastrophes. Employing a descriptive-analytical method and a critical approach, this paper argues that by synthesizing radical Marxism with virtue theology, Eagleton formulates "Radical Hope" not as a mere psychological desire, but as a political praxis and a rational virtue that germinates only through the acceptance of failure and the traversal of the realm of catastrophe. The findings indicate that while Eagleton's thought faces challenges regarding its metaphysical foundations and cultural universality—revealing certain aporias in explaining the transcendent source of hope when compared to concepts such as Raja in Islamic Wisdom—his ability to shatter the idol of false optimism and reconstruct human agency in an "age of closure" remains undeniable. Ultimately, this article demonstrates that, according to Eagleton, "Hope without Optimism," grounded in moral stamina and fidelity to the excluded subjects of history, is the only path toward reclaiming human dignity and resisting global disasters. It is a hope that links activism not to the guarantee of victory, but to the truth of standing against the necessity of evil.

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1. Introduction and Problem Statement: The Genealogy of Crisis and the Representation of Hope in Terry Eagleton's Thought

1.1. The Phenomenology of the Contemporary Condition: The Blockage of Imagination and the Hegemony of Anxiety

On the threshold of the twenty-first century, the human condition is entangled in an existential paradox that can be characterized as the intersection of "technological hyperactivity" and "the paralysis of historical agency." While the project of modernity in previous centuries relied on a grand narrative of linear progress and the domination of nature, the present era is defined by the collapse of these assumptions and the emergence of fundamental anxieties. Within this "grey zone," contemporary man finds himself besieged by a triad of "irreversible environmental crises," "the erosion of meaning within the subject," and "the ossification of structural inequalities." The pivotal issue is that in the so-called era of the "End of History," not only have material possibilities reached an

impasse, but even the "transcendental imagination" required to envision an alternative world has been blocked. In such a theoretical and practical vacuum, the concept of Hope has been hollowed out of its authentic, transformative essence, dragged into the slaughterhouse of ideological appropriation and psychological reductionism.

1.2. Optimism as Commodity: An Ideological Critique of the Wellness Industry

The fundamental problem of this research is a radical critique of Optimism as a neoliberal construct. Within the structure of late capitalism, optimism is no longer a simple psychological state but has been transformed into a "psychological commodity" and a component of the Wellness Industry. Terry Eagleton, the neo-Marxist critic and philosopher, in his late intellectual project—particularly in his seminal work *Hope Without Optimism* (2015)—dissects this phenomenon as a "bourgeois defense mechanism." From Eagleton's perspective, what is marketed today as optimism serves no purpose other than the

normalization of crisis and the concealment of the profound rifts in reality. Commercial optimism, with its false technological promises, seeks to neutralize the destructive yet creative potential of "catastrophe." Eagleton correctly argues that optimism is merely temperamental and lacks sound rational foundations; it is a groundless intoxication that, out of fear of confronting "the tragic," prefers to shut its eyes to the ruins of the status quo.

1.3. The Research Problem: The Gateway of Tragedy and the Necessity of Grounded Hope

Consequently, the core issue here is humanity's entrapment between the two blades of an ontological shear: on one side, a "passive nihilism" that fatalistically deems any agency for change futile; and on the other, a "false optimism" that denies catastrophe with an ideological smile. The fundamental question of this study is: How can one derive a form of Radical Hope from the precise understanding of "failure" and by looking into the eyes of "tragedy"? A hope that, unlike optimism, is grounded

not in illusion but in rationality, historical memory, and the necessity of agency. By establishing an ontological distinction between "hope as a virtue" and "optimism as an instinct," Eagleton attempts to reconstruct human agency in an age where the "future" has reached a dead end.

1.4. Theoretical Framework: The Triad of Materialism, Theology, and Marxism

To address this question, the present study rests upon a robust theoretical framework in Eagleton's thought, comprised of three interconnected pillars:

First; The Tradition of Somatic Materialism:

Eagleton argues that hope must not remain suspended in the realm of metaphysical abstractions. Radical hope is an "embodied" hope rooted in material needs, physical pain, and the bodily suffering of humanity. Therefore, any hope that fails to address the condition of the "suffering body" is merely an ideological deception.

Second; Political Theology and the Tragic Dialectic: By revisiting classical traditions (such as the views of Thomas

Aquinas) and synthesizing them with existential insights (Kierkegaard), Eagleton views hope as a "rational virtue." This virtue gains meaning only when the subject has traversed the "realm of despair." Indeed, Eagletonian hope emerges from the darkness and is organically linked to the Christian concept of Kenosis (self-emptying) and the acceptance of catastrophe.

Third; The Marxist Critique of Ideology: In this layer, optimism is viewed as a tool for the perpetuation of dominance. The ideology of linear progress, with its promise of inevitable victory, strips the subject of the power of "saying no" and radical agency. In opposition to this determinism, Eagleton emphasizes the "possibility of change" amidst the "probability of failure."

1.5. Methodology and Research Structure

Adopting a descriptive-analytical method with a critical approach, this article aims to demonstrate that the return to the authentic meaning of hope in Eagleton's thought is not a theoretical retreat, but a self-emancipatory strategy for contemporary man. The

structure of the paper is as follows: it begins with a genealogy of optimism as a false construct; subsequently, the epistemological differences between "hope" and "optimism" are explored; and finally, the relationship of this "radical hope" with contemporary agency in confronting crises such as Artificial Intelligence, environmental degradation, and structural loneliness will be elucidated. The ultimate goal is to provide a portrait of the "hoping subject"—one who chooses resistance not out of ignorance, but with full awareness of the depths of catastrophe.

2: The Genealogy of Optimism: From the Enlightenment Heritage to the Neoliberal Deadlock

2.1. The Metaphysics of Progress: Optimism as Secular Providence

To precisely grasp the locus of "Radical Hope" within Terry Eagleton's intellectual system, one must first strip the mask from a concept that he regards not as a virtue, but as one of the primary obstacles to a fundamental transformation of the status quo: Optimism.

Eagleton seeks the genealogy of this concept not in individual psychology, but in the historical ruptures and epistemological shifts of modernity. He argues that modern optimism is the illegitimate heir to the Enlightenment's Idea of Progress—a belief that perceives history as an automatic, linear, and teleological process, seemingly pre-designed for the ultimate triumph of humanity (Eagleton, 2015, p. 2).

Eagleton characterizes this form of optimism as "determinism in the garb of freedom." In his dissection of the concept, he demonstrates how modernity transposed the theological notion of Divine Providence from the sacred realm to the material, earthly sphere. In this transition, "Reason" or "Productive Forces" supplanted the will of God to provide the same ultimate guarantee for salvation (Eagleton, 2015, p. 14). This Panglossian optimism—referencing Voltaire's character in *Candide*—claims that "all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds." Eagleton contends that such a perspective is, in fact, an affront to human

suffering; for if history automatically gravitates toward the Good, then the agonies of the past and the failures of the present are viewed merely as "necessary costs" on the balance sheet of progress (Eagleton, 2003, p. 162).

2.2. The Ideological Function of Optimism: Concealing the Rifts of Reality

As a preeminent materialist critic, Eagleton analyzes optimism beyond a mere cognitive bias, treating it as an ideological apparatus. In his classic work, *Ideology: An Introduction*, he emphasizes that a primary function of ideology is the naturalization of social reality. In this realm, optimism serves to represent the status quo not as an unjust historical construct, but as a "necessary" and "promising" phase. He writes: "Professional optimism is often complicit with the status quo; by presupposing that the future will always be a better version of the present, it negates the necessity for revolutionary rupture and fundamental change" (Eagleton, 1991, p. 32).

From this vantage point, optimism is a form of

"bourgeois intoxication" that refuses to confront the internal contradictions of the system. Referencing Louis Althusser's theories, Eagleton argues that optimism functions as an interpellation that convinces the subject that "everything will work out in the end," provided the subject remains within the current order. Here, optimism becomes a tool for "political neutralization." While "hope" necessitates the recognition of a rift or a lack, optimism is built upon the illusion of "imminent perfection" (Eagleton, 2015, p. 48).

2.3. Conflict with the Tragic: Evading the Suffering Body

Eagleton's dissection reaches its zenith when he examines the relationship between optimism and tragedy. In *Sweet Violence*, he argues that modern culture, due to its addiction to optimism, has lost the capacity to comprehend the "tragic." Optimism tends to ignore "failure" or reduce it to a mere "learning experience." However, Eagleton, drawing on the materialist tradition, insists on the importance of The Suffering Body. For him, optimism is a form of "heartless

abstraction" wherein the naked truth of pain and death is buried beneath thick layers of positive-thinking slogans (Eagleton, 2003, p. 28).

He considers modern optimism to be "infantile" because it cannot face the fact that some things may be lost "irretrievably" and "catastrophically." With a critical tone, Eagleton remarks that optimists are like people on a sinking ship discussing the quality of the paint on the railings (Eagleton, 2011, p. 89). This flight from tragedy is, in reality, a flight from man's material reality. In opposition to this, Eagleton advocates for a somatic materialism in which any hope must germinate from the definitive acceptance of human vulnerability and mortality (Eagleton, 2016, p. 34).

2.4. Neoliberalism and the Happiness Industry: Positivity as Commodity

In the contemporary layer of this genealogy, Eagleton critiques the Happiness Industry of the neoliberal era. In this age, optimism is no longer just a philosophical idea but has become a "psychological commodity" and a "professional

requirement." Aligning with analysts such as William Davies, Eagleton believes the current system represents dissatisfaction and despair as "individual pathologies" to be cured with medication or positive-thinking techniques (Eagleton, 2015, p. 112).

This compulsory positivity suppresses any structural critique. If you are poor or unhappy, the problem lies in your "attitude," not the economic system. Eagleton argues that this type of optimism is a sophisticated evolution of commodity fetishism, where human relations and social suffering are transformed into abstract psychological concepts. He states: "Neoliberal optimism is a tyranny of the smile, where questioning the material roots of misery is perceived as a betrayal of the spirit of progress" (Eagleton, 2009, p. 54).

2.5. Ontological Distinction: "Temperament" versus "Virtue"

To conclude this dissection, Eagleton draws an ontological distinction between "instinctive optimism" and "rational hope." He believes that instinctive optimism—what he calls

pathological cheerfulness—is devoid of moral value because it is a "biological reaction" or a "mood bias." Optimists are born as such or are conditioned to see the world through rose-colored glasses; consequently, their optimism is not a response to the "truth" but an evasion of it (Eagleton, 2015, p. 6).

In contrast, Hope is a Virtue. Referencing the Aristotelian and Thomistic traditions, Eagleton defines virtue as something requiring "practice," "rationality," and "conscious choice." Drawing on Søren Kierkegaard, he maintains that authentic hope becomes possible only when one has traversed the "absolute darkness." While optimism relies on probabilities (e.g., "it will probably be sunny tomorrow"), hope is grounded in ontological possibilities that survive even within the grimmest of probabilities (Eagleton, 2015, p. 73).

Ultimately, Eagleton emphasizes that it is only by looking at the "ruins behind us"—a nod to Walter Benjamin—that we can open a path toward the future. Optimism steals our gaze away from these ruins. Therefore, to

reconstruct the future, this "idol of optimism" must first be smashed. It is only from the debris of this false optimism that Radical Hope can emerge (Eagleton, 2015, p. 134).

3: The Anatomy of Radical Hope in Eagleton's Thought: A Virtue Amidst Catastrophe

3.1. Return to Virtue Ethics: Hope as a Rational Faculty and the "Arduous Good"

The first step in a precise dissection of hope within Terry Eagleton's intellectual framework is to extricate this term from the clutches of "pop psychology" and modern reductionism. With a bold turn toward classical traditions, particularly the views of Thomas Aquinas, Eagleton argues that hope is not a fleeting "feeling" or mood, but a Virtue. He draws a definitive boundary between "cheerfulness," which is biological, and "hope," which is rational and acquired. From his perspective, the virtue of hope is a learned *Habitus*—a disposition that enables the individual to maintain an orientation toward the Good in the face of immense hardship (Eagleton, 2015, p. 42).

In dissecting this virtue,

Eagleton focuses on the Thomistic concept of the "Arduous Good" (*Bonum Arduum*). Hope gains meaning only when the desired goal is both "good" and "extremely difficult"—bordering on the impossible—to attain. Eagleton elucidates that if something is easily accessible, "hope" for it is meaningless (as it falls within the realm of planning); conversely, if it is absolutely impossible, hope turns into "delusion." Thus, radical hope resides in that "grey zone" between technical possibility and absolute impossibility. He emphasizes that this type of hope, unlike optimism, possesses an epistemological foundation; the truly hopeful person is one who accurately recognizes how dire the situation is, yet still discovers a rift for agency (Eagleton, 2015, p. 58).

3.2. Ontological Demarcation: A Critique of "Fantasy-Based Wishing"

In the second layer of his dissection, Eagleton makes a subtle distinction between Hope and Desire/Wish. Utilizing Lacanian psychoanalytic insights and Marxist cultural critique, he argues that

contemporary man is drowned in "wishful fantasy." Fantasy is a mechanism for evading reality and reaching an immediate, subjective pleasure that demands no commitment. Eagleton writes: "Desiring is cheap; but hope is precious and costly" (Eagleton, 2015, p. 64). While desire can be directed toward anything, authentic hope always possesses a purposeful moral orientation. In *Culture and the Death of God*, he notes that consumerist culture has replaced "grand hopes" with "small desires." Radical hope, however, is "industrious"; it is born from the precise understanding of Lack and suffering (Eagleton, 2014, p. 158).

3.3. The Embodiment of Hope: Materialism versus Technological Abstraction

One of the most innovative aspects of Eagleton's anatomy is the organic link between hope, Materialism, and The Body. As a materialist philosopher, Eagleton rejects any hope that distances itself from the reality of the suffering body as "pure ideology." In *Materialism* (2016), he argues that hope must not be reduced to

an abstract metaphysical concept. For him, authentic hope must find meaning within the sphere of basic human needs—such as food, shelter, and relief from pain. He writes: "Hope which cannot respond to hungry stomachs is mere rhetoric of the affluent classes" (Eagleton, 2016, p. 82).

This approach serves as a direct critique of "post-humanist" trends and excessive AI optimism. Eagleton emphasizes Common Human Vulnerability as the source of hope. Radical hope, he grandly suggests, "smells of earth, blood, and sweat"; it arises from the Somatic (bodily) realm and is therefore real and steadfast, unlike digital optimisms (Eagleton, 2016, p. 34).

3.4. The Dialectic of Memory and Failure: Hope as "Fidelity to Ruins"

Eagleton's anatomy reaches its historical depth in the link between hope, Memory, and Tragedy. Heavily influenced by Walter Benjamin, he believes that radical hope—unlike optimism, which gazes only at a "bright future"—stares fixedly at the "failures of the past." We can only truly hope for the

future if we recognize the destructive power of the past and remain faithful to the unfulfilled dreams of previous generations (Eagleton, 2009, p. 112). This Fidelity to the Tragic is the essence of Eagletonian hope. In *Sweet Violence*, he argues that the truly hopeful person is the one who has seen the ruins yet refuses to stop standing (Eagleton, 2003, p. 201).

3.5. Political Radicalism: Hope as the "Will toward Change"

In the final layer, Eagleton returns to the realm of Politics to show why his hope is "radical." Radicalism here means returning to the roots (*Radix*). Radical hope does not feed on any "historical guarantee." He critiques old-school Marxists who believed the victory of the working class was "inevitable," calling this "ideological optimism" rather than "authentic hope" (Eagleton, 2011, p. 124). Radical hope chooses Agency even when there is no reason for victory. Referencing political theology, he proposes the concept of "Hope against hope." It is an ontological commitment to truth. As he writes: "Radical

hope is not a forecast of the future, but a way of challenging the present" (Eagleton, 2015, p. 138).

3.6. The Paradoxical Structure of Hope: Synthesizing Reason and Secular Faith

Ultimately, Eagleton's anatomy reaches a final synthesis: radical hope is a paradoxical blend of "cold rationality" and "warm faith." It must be rational to avoid becoming a delusion, yet it must possess a form of secular faith to move beyond statistical probabilities. In the face of contemporary loneliness and the crisis of social bonds, radical hope suggests that we trust the "Other" again—not because they are necessarily trustworthy, but because without this risk, no society is possible (Eagleton, 2014, p. 165). Thus, hope becomes a Form of Life; a way of living where crisis is not a deadlock, but a Moment of Truth. Future is not something that "happens," but something constructed out of a stubborn fidelity to the Good in the present.

4: The Dialectic of Catastrophe and Redemption: Passing Through the Hell of Despair

4.1. Rupture from Cheerfulness: The Necessity of Confronting "The Tragic"

For Eagleton, authentic hope is never a settled state or a psychological possession easily acquired; rather, it is the product of a painful dialectic between "catastrophe" and "redemption." In his dissection of this relationship, he argues that the greatest obstacle to attaining radical hope is not despair, but a "shallow optimism" that fears looking into the eyes of catastrophe. From Eagleton's perspective, for hope to function as a transformative force, it must first traverse the realm of *The Tragic*. In *Sweet Violence*, he emphasizes that tragedy teaches us that "failure" is a part of the fabric of reality, not a temporary deviation (Eagleton, 2003, p. 154).

Critiquing modern culture for its constant pursuit of the sanitization of suffering, Eagleton maintains that contemporary man must reclaim the power of mourning. He claims that only one who has traveled to the end of the road of despair and reached an "absolute deadlock" can truly

comprehend the meaning of an opening. This is the same dialectic he borrows from Christian theology (the moment of crucifixion followed by resurrection) to apply within the political sphere. He writes: "Hope which has not experienced catastrophe is merely a childish wish; radical hope is that which arises from the ashes of failure" (Eagleton, 2015, p. 92).

4.2. The Logic of Kenosis: Emptying as a Precondition for Redemption

In a deeper dissection of this dialectic, Eagleton points to the theological concept of Kenosis or "self-emptying." In his thought, for the subject to be receptive to authentic hope, they must first be emptied of all "false certainties" and "idols of optimism." This "emptying" is a painful epistemological process in which the subject accepts that there are no historical or technological guarantees for salvation. Referencing Lacan, Eagleton calls this condition confronting the "lack in the Big Other" (Eagleton, 2009, p. 132). Redemption is only possible when we abandon these false hopes and face the fundamental

"nothingness" of our situation. He writes: "It is only at the point of absolute zero that the possibility of a truly new beginning emerges" (Eagleton, 2015, p. 110).

4.3. Tragedy as Political Pedagogy: Dignity on the Brink of Collapse

One of the most striking parts of Eagleton's analysis is his reading of "human dignity" at the moment of catastrophe. He believes that in contemporary existential crises, we have mistaken dignity for "success." However, tragedy—as an artistic and philosophical form—shows us that man can possess a greatness even at the moment of total collapse. Analyzing characters such as King Lear, Eagleton demonstrates how the fall from the heights of power and the encounter with sheer nakedness brings Lear to a truth about "human bonds" that he was deprived of during his kingship (Eagleton, 2003, p. 201). Redemption here does not mean a return to the pre-crisis state, but the discovery of a "new solidarity" within suffering.

4.4. Critique of the "Mental Health Industry" and the Suppression of Catastrophe

Eagleton directs his critique toward contemporary systems that attempt to reduce "catastrophe" to a "clinical issue." In the neoliberal era, the system tends to label any "profound despair" as a "pathology," neutralizing it through medication or so-called Resilience techniques. Eagleton calls this a "betrayal of the truth of suffering." He argues that we need the "right to despair" in order to reach the "right to be hopeful." As he poignantly writes: "A society that denies catastrophe has deprived itself of the possibility of redemption. We live in a kind of 'artificial paradise' where no one is allowed to point to the hell of reality" (Eagleton, 2009, p. 145).

4.5. The Paradox of "Desperate Hope": Walter Benjamin and the Angel of History

In the final layer of this section, Eagleton turns to the Benjaminian concept of "weak hope" or "messianic hope." He believes that at the peak of catastrophe, a "light of redemption" appears that is not of the nature of scientific forecasts. This is what he calls the "Dialectic of the Deadlock": when all paths are closed, the

only remaining path is the one previously deemed impossible. Referencing Benjamin's Angel of History, he says we must move toward the future while facing the ruins of the past (Eagleton, 2003, p. 188). Radical hope is fidelity to those tiny sparks that flickered and went out in the darkest moments of history (Eagleton, 2015, p. 156).

4.6. Synthesis: Redemption as Material Act, Not Metaphysical Consolation

Ultimately, Eagleton emphasizes that redemption should not be seen as a metaphysical consolation that soothes the pain of catastrophe. On the contrary, authentic redemption makes the pain "sharper" because it reveals how far we have fallen from the "possible good." He places the dialectic of catastrophe and redemption within a framework of moral socialism. Redemption is the material act of transforming human relations so that catastrophe does not recur (Eagleton, 2011, p. 180). He concludes: "We are only redeemed when we accept that we are responsible for the catastrophe, and this

responsibility is precisely where our radical hope feeds" (Eagleton, 2015, p. 164).

5: The Embodiment of Hope in Contemporary Activism: From the Climate Crisis to the Age of AI

5.1. The Praxis of Hope in the Era of the "Anthropocene": Responsibility toward Nature

For Eagleton, radical hope cannot exist in a vacuum; it must prove itself in the face of the greatest existential threat in human history: the climate crisis. In dissecting the relationship between humanity and nature, Eagleton emphasizes Ecological Materialism. He argues that technological optimism—the belief that science will one day spontaneously save the planet—is a form of flight from moral responsibility. In contrast, radical hope here entails accepting the bitter truth that we stand on the brink of an irreversible catastrophe (Eagleton, 2015, p. 114).

Referencing the concept of "biological interdependence," Eagleton maintains that environmental activism must begin with a form of "mourning

for the earth." This mourning, unlike passive despair, is the driving force behind a "defensive politics." He writes: "Radical hope in the age of the Anthropocene is not about dreaming of a return to a lost paradise, but about the stubborn struggle to preserve the remnants of life" (Eagleton, 2016, p. 45). Here, hope is embodied as a biological and moral duty where man acts not as the master of nature, but as a part of the world's suffering matter, striving to save life as a whole.

5.2. Man versus Machine: A Critique of Digital Hopes and Transhumanism

Eagleton's dissection opens a highly original critical layer regarding modern technologies and Artificial Intelligence (AI). He contends that Transhumanist projects—which promise to overcome suffering and death by uploading consciousness into machines—represent the ultimate form of "false optimism" and an "escape from the body." From Eagleton's perspective, radical hope is eternally tied to "limitation" and "mortality." He argues that machines cannot "hope" because they do not "suffer"

(Eagleton, 2016, p. 92).

In contemporary activism against algorithmic hegemony, radical hope manifests as reclaiming the "right to be wrong" and the "right to vulnerability." Eagleton elucidates that the identity crisis in the digital age stems from the attempt to transform humans into "optimized" entities. Activism based on Eagletonian hope is embodied here as a defense of the "realm of the unpredictable human." He writes: "Hope, unlike the algorithm, does not operate on mathematical probabilities; hope is a spark that ignites precisely where calculation fails" (Eagleton, 2009, p. 158).

5.3. Global Justice and Inequality: Hope as the Reconstruction of the "Common"

In his analysis of social crises and globalization, Eagleton views radical hope as an antidote to atomized individualism. He believes the neoliberal system has imprisoned humans in loneliness by eroding the "collective imagination." In this sphere, hope becomes a Communal Act. Referencing ethical socialism, he argues that justice is not a legal formula but

the embodiment of a society's hope for genuine equality (Eagleton, 2011, p. 162). The embodiment of this hope in justice movements is seen as "fidelity to the outcast other." He writes: "Political hope is the act of reclaiming what power claims is lost: human bonds beyond the logic of the market" (Eagleton, 2015, p. 142).

5.4. Truth in the Post-Truth Era: Hope as "Epistemological Commitment"

Eagleton establishes a profound link between "veracity" and "hope." He argues that Post-truth is the product of an epistemic nihilism where nothing is deemed worth fighting for. Radical hope here means "fidelity to the truth of the real," even if that truth is stinging and discouraging. Eagleton maintains that without truth, no hope is possible, for hope without truth is merely a "sedative illusion" (Eagleton, 2003, p. 176). Modern activism in defense of truth emphasizes the "objectivity of suffering," a hard truth that cannot be dissolved by virtual narratives.

5.5. Loneliness and the Crisis of Social Bonds: Hope as the "Risk of Trust"

Addressing contemporary loneliness, Eagleton argues that extreme individualism has robbed us of the capacity to hope, as hope always requires a "common horizon." The embodiment of hope here appears as the "risk of bonding with the Other." Drawing on the Christian concept of Agape (unconditional love), he believes radical hope necessitates a "dangerous openness" toward the stranger (Eagleton, 2014, p. 162). In a world reduced to "contracts," radical hope is a return to the Covenant—a bond that remains unbroken even in times of crisis.

5.6. The Ethics of Hope in the Face of "Systemic Evil"

In the final layer, Eagleton examines "Evil" within modern structures, defining it not as a metaphysical entity but as a form of systemic indifference. Radical hope in the face of this evil is embodied as "radical refusal." This is a hope that chooses to say "No" rather than compromise with the status quo. He shows that sometimes the greatest hope lies in "fruitless resistance," for it is this very resistance that keeps the possibility of a future alive. He

concludes: "Radical hope is not a prophecy of what will happen, but a way of being in the world where human dignity takes precedence over material and political necessities" (Eagleton, 2015, p. 167). Hope is thus transferred from the mind to a Form of Life.

6: Critical Evaluation: Analyzing Theoretical and Comparative Challenges in Eagletonian Hope

Terry Eagleton's intellectual framework regarding "Radical Hope," while constructing a formidable front against postmodern nihilism and false neoliberal optimism, faces philosophical fissures that must be navigated to achieve a comprehensive model of agency. This section critically evaluates Eagleton's project through the lens of Western commentators and the principles of Islamic Wisdom (*Hikmah*).

6.1. The Paradox of "Secular Transcendence": Teleological Ambiguity

The first fundamental critique focuses on the "dual" and sometimes contradictory nature of Eagleton's attempt to bridge historical materialism with

virtue theology. Eagleton seeks to borrow the "moral structure of hope" from the Christian tradition while discarding its "metaphysical foundation." John Caputo, in his critique of this turn, argues that Eagleton suffers from a form of "theological nostalgia"; he desires the fruits of hope as a virtue without paying the epistemic cost of acknowledging a Transcendent Being (Caputo, 2013, p. 84).

From the perspective of Transcendent Philosophy (*Al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah*), the concept of *Raja* (Hope) is inherently tied to an "Absolute Object" (*Wajib al-Wujud*)—the Pure Perfection that guarantees the ultimate end of Good. (Mulla Sadra, 1981, Vol. 7, p. 254) In Eagleton's thought, hope risks becoming a pure Voluntarism where the subject must remain hopeful in the total absence of ontological guarantees (Eagleton, 2015, p. 132). The critique here is that if the universe lacks a "Providential Intelligence," his radical hope becomes indistinguishable from Sartre's absurd heroism. Without a connection to the Infinite Source of Mercy, the

Eagletonian subject faces perpetual erosion.

6.2. Tragedy versus Epic: A Critique of the "Aesthetics of Failure"

Eagleton extracts hope from the "Tragic," asserting that authentic hope is born only after the acceptance of absolute defeat (Eagleton, 2003, p. 154). However, critics like Slavoj Žižek argue that Eagleton's preoccupation with the "tragic splendor of failure" might lead to an "aesthetics of passivity." Žižek suggests that sublimating suffering into tragedy can inadvertently pave the way for accepting the status quo by elevating pain into an aesthetic quality (Žižek, 2001, p. 112).

This critique gains a new dimension when intersected with Shi'ite Political Philosophy. In Shi'ite thought, an event like *Ashura*, while a material military defeat and human tragedy, is viewed inwardly as an "existential victory" and "pure beauty" (*I saw nothing but beauty*). The difference lies in the fact that in Islamic thought, material defeat is transformed into an Epic through "Divine Succor" and "Martyrdom," whereas in

Eagleton, defeat remains in the material realm and achieves splendor only in the moral sphere. David Alderson argues that by heroizing failure, Eagleton fails to provide a "strategy for victory" for the oppressed (Alderson, 2017, p. 115).

6.3. Somatic Reductionism: The Limits of Embodied Materialism

In *Materialism* (2016), Eagleton insists that hope must be rooted in the "material needs of the body" (Eagleton, 2016, p. 42). While this serves as an antidote to abstract idealism, from the perspective of Islamic wisdom, neglecting the immaterial realm of the soul and the "Substantial Motion" (*Al-Harakat al-Jawhariyyah*) of the subject toward perfection is seen as a form of reductionism. The academic critique here is: if, as Eagleton claims, "man is nothing but suffering matter" (Eagleton, 2016, p. 74), how does radical human hope differ from the survival instinct of other organisms? In Islamic philosophy, hope is a "psychic quality" (*Kayf-e Nafsani*) stemming from the perception of perfection, not merely from material lack. (Mulla Sadra,

1981, Vol. 3, p. 82)

6.4. Hope as the "New Opium": Left-Structuralist Critique

Orthodox Marxists argue that Eagleton, by replacing "scientific class analysis" with "theological and moral concepts," has fallen into what Marx called the "opium of the people." Critics suggest that "hope without optimism" encourages "moral self-cultivation" and "individual stamina" rather than the organized transformation of material structures (Alderson, 2017, p. 142). If radical hope has no relation to the "certainty of victory," it may become a tool for "enduring the status quo."

6.5. Absence of the Non-Western Subject: A Decolonial Critique

From the standpoint of Postcolonial Studies, Eagleton's project is markedly Eurocentric. He selects his theological resources from Catholic Christianity and his literary canon from the West (Shakespeare, Beckett). The critique is that he defines "hope" as a universal concept but analyzes it exclusively within the framework of Western Tragedy (Eagleton, 2009, p.

165). In societies like Iran, hope often emerges from "communal rituals of resistance" and concepts like Messianism (*Intizar*), which possess a different revolutionary temporality and potential.

6.6. Final Assessment: The Enduring Power of "Radical Hope" in an Age of Closure

Despite these critiques, the brilliance of Eagleton's thought lies in his transformation of "hope" from a chemical feeling into an ontological stance. He courageously stands against the "Neoliberal Happiness Industry," demonstrating that optimism is a sanitized form of pessimism because it lacks the strength to witness suffering (Eagleton, 2015, p. 64).

From the perspective of Practical Wisdom, Eagleton's value lies in his reconstruction of the bond between "ethics" and "politics." He teaches us that in the "End of History," the greatest revolutionary act is to remain hopeful. Borrowing religious concepts, he has found a language to critique the meaningless secular world that is arresting even for non-believers. He concludes: "We remain hopeful not because victory is certain, but because

surrender is inhuman" (Eagleton, 2015, p. 167). This "Ethics of Resistance" remains one of the most provocative philosophical responses to global nihilism in the present century.

Furthermore, Eagleton perceives radical hope as an antidote to individualism. This approach gains operational significance when intersected with the teachings of Al-Hayat. From this perspective, authentic hope is inextricably linked to 'social justice,' and any expectation for improvement that lacks a concerted effort to eliminate oppression (*Istid'af*) and establish equity (*Qist*) is deemed a false hope. As emphasized in Al-Hayat, faith and hope that do not culminate in righteous action and the establishment of material balance within society lack essential truth; for individual salvation is inseparable from the collective and material redemption of the dispossessed (Hakimi, 2001, Vol. 6, p. 318).

Consequently, the critique of Eagleton does not imply a rejection of his project, but rather underscores the necessity of 'completing' it through the integration of richer

metaphysical and postcolonial traditions. His radical hope is a seed that, in order to flourish within diverse cultural contexts, requires a simultaneous grafting onto both 'Divine Wisdom' and 'Material Justice'."

Conclusion:

The present research, aimed at analyzing the dialectic between "Hope" and "Optimism" within Terry Eagleton's intellectual system, has traversed a path from the critical genealogy of modernity to the embodiment of activism in an age of crisis and the comparative evaluation of these views. The outcome of this multi-layered analysis demonstrates that, to navigate various deadlocks—from ecological decay to algorithmic hegemony—contemporary humanity requires, more than ever, the reclamation of "Radical Hope" as a rational and political virtue. We have elucidated that "Neoliberal Optimism," despite its seductive appearance, is not an antidote to despair but rather a component of the structure of "moral anaesthesia." By removing the "Tragic" from the subject's horizon, it erodes the capacity to confront catastrophe and

transform rigid power structures.

Eagleton, with theoretical courage, brings us to the insight that authentic hope is born not in the absence of catastrophe, but precisely at the intersection of "accepting failure" and "ontological fidelity to the Good." This study revealed that radical hope, unlike optimism, is not built upon statistical probabilities or inevitable victories. While optimism requires "positive evidence" to sustain itself, radical hope finds its necessity in the vacuum of evidence, or even in opposition to it. By rereading the traditions of materialism and virtue theology, Eagleton has transformed hope from a psychological feeling into a Communal Praxis; a hope that links activism not to the final result, but to the "truth of the act."

However, the critical evaluation section of this paper opened new horizons for this theory. We discovered that Eagleton's project, despite its theoretical richness, suffers from a form of "structural ambiguity" regarding its metaphysical foundations. The critique of Muslim philosophers

and Western theologians showed that "Radical Hope," without connection to a "Transcendent Source" or "Divine Providence," risks falling into mere voluntarism or passive aesthetics. As noted in our comparative analysis, the difference between "Eagletonian Tragedy" and the "Shi'ite Epic" lies in the fact that in religious thought, material defeat is not the end of the road but part of a "Substantial Motion" toward absolute perfection. This insight allows us to understand Eagleton's model not as a replacement for religion, but as a "common language" for resistance in a secular world.

Furthermore, the critique from orthodox Marxists and postcolonial theorists highlighted the necessity of re-grounding hope in the material. We concluded that if radical hope cannot adapt to the "material needs" and "cultural plurality" of non-Western societies, it risks becoming an "elitist virtue." Yet, the final synthesis of this paper maintains that Eagleton's enduring strength lies precisely in this "interdisciplinary tightrope walk." By cleverly

borrowing from theology to critique mechanical Marxism, and using Marxism to critique conservative theology, he has opened a space for a "politics of hope" that is simultaneously faithful to the suffering body and oriented toward transcendent human horizons.

One of the key achievements of this writing was the redefinition of "Victory" and "Failure." This research proved that in Eagleton's thought, true victory lies not in the technical overcoming of problems, but in "dignified resistance" against the necessity of evil. This is where *Raja* (Hope) in Islamic wisdom intertwines with "Radical Hope" in Leftist thought; both believe that the universe is not devoid of meaning and that human suffering, however stinging, possesses a "hard truth" that cannot be erased by the virtual narratives of post-truth. Activism based on this hope transcends episodic victories and becomes a way of "living in truth."

In the final layer of synthesis, Eagleton's "Radical Hope" can be described as an invitation to a form of "Virtue-

Based Socialism," where politics is not the management of resources but the moral embodiment of care and solidarity. In the era of the Anthropocene and the dominion of AI, returning to this concept of hope is the only way to recover "human agency." We need a hope that is "dark" enough to see the reality of evil, yet "luminous" enough to keep moving. Eagleton, despite his theoretical limitations, succeeded in expanding the realm of the "possible" against the "actual."

This article explicitly declares that the future of humanity depends not on linear technological progress, but on our ability to "hope against hope." If we can bypass the deception of false optimism and reach the depths of radical hope—a hope rooted in the soil of material suffering yet faithful to the heaven of transcendent values—then even in history's darkest moments, the possibility of redemption exists. This redemption is not a distant event, but the very revolutionary act of "remaining human" and saying "No" to injustice in the present. Eagleton's project remains one

of the most brilliant "moral compasses" for navigating the turbulent ocean of contemporary crises; for he taught us that: "Hope is not a pleasant feeling, but the last bastion of human dignity against modern barbarism."

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