

## A PROMISE FOR HOPE

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**Abstract.** We aim here at three objectives. First, we will offer an overview of the way that hope was framed in philosophy until now and stress the factors that made it a more or less important preoccupation for various thinkers. Next, we will discuss in detail recent writings on hope and comment on their findings. Finally, we will bring forth promising as a speech act on which the state (or the reality) of hope is founded.

**Keywords:** hope; speech acts; philosophy; individual; community; bond.

We would probably have not taken up the subject of hope today if most of us had not felt a deep doubt about it. Hope seems unfashionable and thus a little ridiculous in everyday conversation and an almost suspect theme for philosophical reflection. Along with the topic of the future, it features among subjects threatened with extinction.

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## INSTANCES OF HOPE

For our first task, we will rely on the comprehensive article on hope in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP)*.<sup>1</sup> We note that hope “has historically only rarely been discussed systematically—with important exceptions, such as Aquinas, Bloch and Marcel—almost all major philosophers acknowledge that hope plays an

<sup>1</sup> Claudia Bloeser and Titus Stahl, “Hope”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/hope/>, accessed: 17 September 2021.

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important role in regard to human motivation, religious belief or politics.”<sup>2</sup> The spiritual profile of these three authors points to the fact that hope is naturally connected not only to immediate, short-term and long-term expectations. It has a lot to do with the ultimate expectations reflected in Christianity and Marxism.

But hope also appears incidentally in the works of Plato, Aristotle, Seneca and Augustin. Plato seems to take a rather negative view of hope in *Timaeus*, since he speaks of “gullible hope,”<sup>3</sup> but we should stress that this appears as a feature of the mortal soul of humans which is contrasted by Plato with the immortal soul so we may not think that for Plato hope is gullible by definition. In fact, the authors of the article in *SEP* contrast that characterization with the one in *Philebus*, where Socrates describes “‘pleasures of anticipation’, that is, expectations of future pleasures, that are called hopes”<sup>4</sup>. Aristotle incidentally comments on hope while explaining the difference between the coward and the courageous man: “The coward, then, is a despairing sort of person; for he fears everything. The brave man, on the other hand, has the opposite disposition; for confidence is the mark of a hopeful disposition.”<sup>5</sup> As for Seneca, he passes quickly over the concept, connecting it with fear. The short list of ancient thinkers’ pronouncements on hope ends with Augustin who marks the juncture of ancient philosophy with Christian philosophy. He states that “Finally, hope, faith and love are seen as interconnected—only if one loves the future fulfillment of God’s will and thus hopes for it, can one arrive at the correct form of faith.”<sup>6</sup> In these lines we find condensed the radical change of accent concerning hope, from the worldly, uninteresting and, if we may say, low status of an ordinary human feature, to the high status of an extraordinary confidence, not only in one’s own will and powers, as in Aristotle, but also in another’s (God’s) assistance.

Aquinas firmly restates the change we have just mentioned. He draws a distinction between ordinary hope and theological hope. The first one is simply a human passion, but the second is a virtue:

While hope as a passion can only be incited by sensible goods (and subsequently motivates action insofar the subject takes herself to be capable to realize that good), we can also hope for God’s assistance in reaching eternal happiness. As eternal life and happiness are not sensible goods, this kind of hope cannot be a passion but must reside in the will.<sup>7</sup>

Another crucial observation that we owe to Aquinas is that theological hope is built on faith: “The rationality of theological hope can only be properly understood, according to Aquinas when we acknowledge that hope has to be preceded by faith (which underlies the belief in the possibility of salvation), but, given faith, hope for the good of salvation is rational.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

We may already say that these prerequisites progressively moved to the background in subsequent philosophical analyses of hope. Still this background continues to subtly inform the accents, doubts or conclusions in contemporary writings on the matter. Concepts like “hope after hope”<sup>9</sup> and “hope against hope”<sup>10</sup> to which we will return later seem to articulate this kind of preoccupation.

In the meantime, we need to complete the diachronic analysis of hope.

For Descartes, “hope is a weaker form of confidence and consists in a desire (a representation of an outcome to be both good for us and possible) together with a disposition to think of it as likely but not certain.”<sup>11</sup> Hobbes views hope as “appetite with an opinion of obtaining”<sup>12</sup>; Spinoza thought of it as “a form of pleasure” and “joy that is mingled with sadness”<sup>13</sup>, leaving Hume to speculate on “a mixture of joy and sorrow that, depending on the predominant element, can be called hope or fear.”<sup>14</sup> Kierkegaard reinforces the distinction between earthly hope and heavenly hope, while Schopenhauer sees it as a mere “folly of the heart.”<sup>15</sup> As always, a spectacular approach to the matter comes from Nietzsche, who, on the one hand, cautions against dupery (“do not believe those who speak to you of extraterrestrial hopes!”<sup>16</sup>) and on the other hand awaits, with a slight malice, “*that mankind be redeemed from revenge: that to me is the bridge to the highest hope and a rainbow after long thunderstorms.*”<sup>17</sup> We find another radical critique of hope in Camus, who rejects both religious and political hope, even if this leads to the untenable position of both acknowledging “the most obvious absurdity” of death and advocating to “the unreconciled and not of one’s own free will”<sup>18</sup>. Incidentally, this is as close to despair as one can get, but hope and despair being correlative concepts, it is only logical to drop both of them if you feel compelled to renounce one. As we shall see in reading contemporary approaches to hope, this conclusion, once accepted, gives a fatal blow to the reasonableness of hope, putting authors in the, if we may say, desperate position of defending larger causes with modest reasoning.

William James and John Dewey, the last two authors analyzed in the *SEP* article call for a special class, since they discuss hope indirectly, in connection with faith and meliorism respectively. James contends that skeptics and agnostics are not more rational than believers and that there is no proof that “dupery through hope” is not much worse than “dupery through fear.” Dewey contrasts meliorism and optimism, criti-

<sup>9</sup> Ronald Aronson, “Hope After Hope?” *Social Research*, vol. 66, no. 2, The New School, 1999, pp. 471–94, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40971333>, accessed: 17 September 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Adrienne M. Martin, *How We Hope. A Moral Psychology*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2013. The author derives this concept from St. Paul. There is also a book with this title by Nadezhda Mandelstam.

<sup>11</sup> C. Bloeser, T. Stahl, “Hope”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

cizing the latter for encouraging “fatalistic contentment with things as they are”, while “The object of hope or meliorism, for Dewey, is first and foremost democracy, which is ‘the simple idea that political and ethical progress hinges on nothing more than persons, their values, and their actions.’”<sup>19</sup>

We have deliberately left Immanuel Kant, Ernst Bloch and Gabriel Marcel for the final part of this account. All three are so important for the matter of hope that they are rightfully discussed at length in the *SEP* article, but also in the books and studies which we are about to engage with. Thus, it seemed proper to draw on them separately.

One of the fundamental questions for Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason* is “For what may I hope?” Although shortening Kant’s demonstrations may seem both hazardous and impolite, the least we may say for our present purpose is that “Kant’s account of hope consequently connects his moral philosophy with his views on religion. He emphasizes the rational potential of such hope, but he also makes clear that rational hope is intimately connected to religious faith, i.e., the belief in God.”<sup>20</sup> One may note the similarity of Kant’s view with that of Aquinas on the matter of rational hope.

Ernst Bloch, following Marx, forces a radical change of course in the analysis of hope, from the otherworldly to the strictly mundane, inaugurating a kind of political hope that we may find also in the writings of Richard Rorty. The question is if a strictly horizontal view of hope can be philosophically founded. And if yes, don’t we need to pit Marx and Bloch against Aquinas and Kant?

Bloch’s contemporary, Gabriel Marcel, starts from the distinction between “I hope...” and “I hope that...” He opts for the vertical view on hope, stating its rationality as follows:

Marcel takes up the question of the rationality of hope in asking whether hope is an illusion that consists in taking one’s wishes for reality. He answers that this objection against the value of hope applies primarily to hopes that are directed towards a particular outcome (“to hope that X”), but it does not apply when hope transcends the imagination. Because the person who hopes *simpliciter* does not anticipate a particular event, her hope cannot be judged with regard to whether it is likely to be fulfilled.<sup>21</sup>

At this stage we may make a comment on the historical trajectory of our concept. We notice a practical treatment of this idea in ancient philosophy, followed by an abrupt elevation in Christian metaphysics complemented by the philosophy of Kant. Starting with Schopenhauer and Nietzsche up to the contemporary pragmatism the main interest is in its psychological benefits. Thus, it is not a surprise that many recent philosophers tend to ponder individual or collective chances of achieving something, treating degrees of hope as psychological correlates of a more or less deep probability calculus.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem.*

## HOPE TODAY. A RATHER COMPROMISING CONCEPT

The topic of hope did not disappear in Western thought after the socio-political catastrophes of the XXth century, but came out quite damaged. Florian Tatschner is right in saying that “[f]or many, those who hold on to hope after two world wars and countless other unspeakable atrocities must be considered as either delusional, despicable, or even dangerous.”<sup>22</sup> So it is with extreme cautiousness that authors proceed towards it. Most of them usually put the accent on the individual’s desires and imagination and launch extensive analyses on human tribulations determined by emotional insecurity. Few of them endeavor to leave the sphere of the self and turn toward interpersonal relations as a premise for hope. In what follows, we will assay their conclusions and point to the pivotal concept that warrants any hope.

Joseph J. Godfrey<sup>23</sup> writes a detailed examination of premises and implications of so-called “deep-grounded hope” through a rigorous study of Kant, Bloch and Marcel.

The first key point we need to comment on is that “[h]oping remains an act that is one’s own, yet in response to another; it is in their Kantian senses, neither autonomous nor heteronomous.”<sup>24</sup> Hope as an act is a description that features prominently in contemporary dissertations on the concept, but it strikes us as ambivalent. To do something in response to “another” means strictly to react, but putting the matter in these terms would have an unacceptable shortcoming for the subject: dispossession of agency. And this, in its turn, looks like an undermining of all (modern) philosophical inquiry. Of course, with “I hope,” the grammar somehow forces upon us the idea that we are doing something, but we need to firmly state that hoping is not our doing. Instead, we are given hope. And giving hope is another’s doing.

The second key point that we have to develop, starting from Godfrey, is the state of openness. Discussing conditions of fundamental hope, he concludes:

Bringing some order to these notions as they bear on fundamental hope seems to require saying the following. (1) The experience of communion is the ground for full hope (experience of communion is also the objective or aim of such hope). (2) Hope-as-openness is hope-in. (3) There is a double ambiguity in relating hope and openness: is openness the same as hope? or is it that openness makes hope possible? And is such openness an orientation toward the future, or an attitude in the present?<sup>25</sup>

The answers to these questions are, first, that openness is not the same as hope and, second, that it is not true that openness makes hope possible. In fact, we need not ask anything about the possibility of hope, since possibility is a pre-requisite for any hope. We do not hope for the impossible. Then, openness is not oriented toward the

<sup>22</sup> Florian Tatschner, “Hope”, in *Critical Terms in Futures Studies* (edited by Heike Paul), Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph J. Godfrey, *A Philosophy of Human Hope*, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Dordrecht, 1987.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 120.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 130.

future. Naive as it may seem to stress this fact, openness is not connected to time, but to space, i.e., the interpersonal ‘space.’ And in this interpersonal space, openness is called “trust,” “confidence” or the like.

The third and final key point we take from Godfrey is his distinction between the “will-nature” and the “interpersonal” ontological models. The first corresponds to the agent’s utilization of objects and the second corresponds to “a self’s appreciative presence to a thou.” These models apply to hope:

Hope’s trust interpreted on the will-nature model implies belief – that what is needed is available as instrument; interpreted on the intersubjective model, it implies reality-of a thou, since such trust requires co-grounding. Thus, insofar as the will-nature model applies, deep-grounded hope is a climate of the mind; insofar as the intersubjective model applies, it is an organ of apprehension, in touch with the reality of a thou.<sup>26</sup>

If we were to clarify the metaphors in Godfrey’s conclusions, we would say that my hope to achieve something by myself in the world (will-nature model) may be reduced to a state characterized by instrumental calculations and probabilities. On the other hand, in the intersubjective model, describing hope as “an organ of apprehension” is ambiguous. Does “to hope” mean “to comprehend” or “to fear”? And what organ is affected: The brain that understands or the heart that fears? The least we can gather from here is that hope to achieve something by the other depends on the reality of the other. Which is true, but it sounds like a premise, not a conclusion.

In Godfrey’s final analysis, “[t]o hope is to risk. At risk is not just disappointment, but also betrayal and self-betrayal. The greater risk is in declining to hope at all, if declining to do so is to depart from human duty, or reason, or developmental possibility.”<sup>27</sup> Similarities with Pascal’s wager are to be noted, but a tendency to describe hoping as one’s doing is also to be noted.

We find yet another systematic approach in Jane M. Waterworth’s *A Philosophical Analysis of Hope*<sup>28</sup> in which the author undertakes a detailed account of hope’s occurrences in language that draws on a valuable suggestion made by Wittgenstein:

One can imagine an animal angry, frightened, unhappy, happy, startled. But hopeful? And why not? A dog believes his master is at the door. But can he also believe his master will come the day after tomorrow? – And what can he not do here? – How do I do it? – How am I supposed to answer this? Can only those hope who can talk? Only those who have mastered the use of a language. That is to say, the phenomena of hope are modes of this complicated form of life. (If a concept refers to a character of human handwriting, it has no application to beings that do not write.)<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 190.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 231.

<sup>28</sup> Jane M. Waterworth, *A Philosophical Analysis of Hope*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

<sup>29</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, tr. G. E. M. Anscombe, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), Pt. II, (i), 174e, cited in Jane M. Waterworth, *A Philosophical Analysis of Hope*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. 5.

Indeed, only humans, and only because they talk, may hope. But why? Wittgenstein leaves us with an incisive intuition and we need to broaden this insight.

Waterworth's essay includes a phenomenology of emotions, imagination and memory, followed by an exploration of the "domain of agency," which comprises goals, authority and commitments. It ends with an impressive commentary on suffering and death.

Taking a different path from that of Godfrey, who attempts a deepening of hope through determinants as "ultimate" and "fundamental", Waterworth insists on contrasting hope and despair. As is always the case, a balanced investigation of correlative concepts is fruitful and the important outcome here is that implications of hope are better illuminated by implications of despair. Thus,

Hope is a stance and despair a response towards other human beings and the world which one may adopt. Hope is not willed, nor is it an urge or a sensation. Neither is hope compelled by particular situations. This applies equally to despair. Adopting hope or despair is not an action 'doing' (though its having been done may be expressed in action). However, one may be considered partly responsible for becoming the kind of person who is likely to hope or despair in situ.<sup>30</sup>

We notice how Waterworth steers away from the tricky perspective of hope as one's doing. She is right to avoid a strictly individualistic view of hope, but she is not quite able to resist the methodological individualism built into contemporary philosophical discourse that leaves us with nothing more than a truism: if hope is a "stance toward the world that one adopts", then it is only logical that "one may be considered partly responsible to hope in situ." This leaves us with an individual burdened by either hope or despair and the fact that the author discusses also authority and the possibility of "false hopes" (from doctors to patients, for instance) does not make the load any easier.

Another problem is that the individualism by default already mentioned leads to some statements that simply contradict what has been just said:

Hope and despair are not states or conditions which simply occur. Human beings do not just happen to hope or despair in like manner to breathing or digesting food. Neither hope nor despair can be considered an involuntary condition of a human body, in this sense. Although hope or despair are common responses to various kinds of suffering, whether man-made or natural disasters, hope and despair themselves are not suffered by human beings but constitute directed responses to the social and natural worlds. Adopting hope or despair is something that human beings *do* as a response to their perception of their own situation, or to their perception of circumstances, in general, and its attendant condition.<sup>31</sup>

Critical endeavors treating the subject from different angles stumble upon the same difficulty of defining the kind of attitude or action that is essential to hoping. Here

<sup>30</sup> J.M. Waterworth, *A Philosophical Analysis of Hope*, p. 16.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 23.

we have seen how in subsequent definitions hope is a sort of mysterious kind of doing which is certainly not clarified by the use of scare quotes or emphasis. Of course, Waterworth and others point to something that is exterior to an agent, but in the same move, by concentrating on the person who hopes, they mistake the real agent of hope. In reality, the agent of hope is the other. Another who gives hope.

The situation is further complicated because the normal analysis of hope is interfered with by such apparently critical and cautionary determinants of hope as “gullible” and “false”. A similar problem appears in the ostensible concept of “false needs”, in which “false” seems to be a subtle companion but is nothing more than a phantom, since needs are felt or not. We do not usually speak about “true needs” or “false needs”. Likewise, we may not speak of “true” and “false” hopes, but simply of hopes. Of course, we need to make clear the precise way in which hopes are given.

In the meantime, let us reflect on the classification of hopes proposed by Waterworth, taking as our criterion the entity that arranges for hoping. She distinguishes<sup>32</sup> between different kinds of hope: an “agent-orchestrated” one (expressed in the logic of “I can, I do”); “mutual-orchestrated” (“If we can, we do (try)”); “other-orchestrated” (“If I cannot, you may”); and, finally, “world-orchestrated” (“If you cannot”).

There are a number of problems with this sketch. First, one is not able to give himself hope. “I can, I do” is pointing to a capacity, not to an expectation. Second, starting with the “mutual-orchestrated” hope, the metaphor of orchestration, upon which the scheme depends, progressively crumbles as an explanatory principle. Then, an arrangement may be done by one or many, but we are not able to mutually arrange anything, because arrangements are not something that we do to each other; rather, they are outcomes. The third kind of hope is the only real one. The fourth is based on an instantiation of “Nature”, this being the procedure usually entertained by philosophers who refuse any glimpse in the metaphysical realm.

Even though we are not compelled to accept all the arguments presented in Jane Waterworth’s account, her book is noteworthy for scrapping a lot of unnecessary baggage in the analysis of the concept we are concerned about and pointing in the right direction by giving due credit to language as the proper medium of hope.

Probably the most widely acknowledged of the recent books on hope is Adrienne Martin’s.<sup>33</sup> A lot of its pages disclose a philosophical approach, although its subtitle – *A Moral Psychology* – skillfully shields the essay from the natural ordeal of any philosophical writing in which every approach must face a certain reproach. Martin challenges the so-called “orthodox definition” of hope (which others call the “standard account”). According to this basic definition, hoping is desiring something and believing the outcome possible but not certain. To be sure, this is a simple and indisputable characterization of a hope, but there are good reasons for finding it unsatisfactory. The impression that something is lacking in this definition affects Martin too, who explains:

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 20.

<sup>33</sup> Adrienne Martin, *How We Hope. A Moral Psychology*.



This methodology is to begin an inquiry about hope by focusing on what I will call hoping against hope or hoping for an outcome that one highly values but believes is extremely unlikely. Hoping against hope has two features in particular that appear to elude the orthodox definition.

First, the orthodox definition strikes many as inadequate to the phenomenology of hoping against hope. When we hope against hope, overcoming our circumstance captures our attention and imagination in a way that seems to go beyond desire. (...) When we hope, the experience often seems more profound than is typical of desire; hope seems to color our experience in a way that is both richer and more specific than does desire.

Second, it is a common pre-theoretical intuition that hoping against hope has a special kind of sustaining power that is uniquely supportive of us in times of trial and tribulation. The orthodox definition seemingly cannot accommodate this intuition. Desiring, even desperately so, to overcome such situations doesn't have any special kind of motivational power. Moreover, recognizing extremely slim odds seems likely only to hold back or make one's efforts more timid.<sup>34</sup>

As we see, Martin's main interest is in analyzing "hope against hope." This uplifting syntagm sounds awkward to many and Martin is aware of that, because she needs to comment on it in a note in which she explains that she took it from St. Paul's reference to Abraham. Thus, what this formula conveys is belief, or faith. In response to disapproval of her using an "irrational" formula, she claims that it is not "obviously" irrational. And she is perfectly right. Moreover, we do not need any assurance as to the rationality of belief, including religious belief, since we are promptly led to such conclusion by Aquinas, Kant and, more recently, by Jean-Luc Marion.<sup>35</sup>

We insist on this point not to convey the impression that Martin's approach is explicitly spiritual, because it is not. As already suggested, it is philosophical and psychological. But trust, belief and faith, even with their strictly secular meanings, are constitutive of hope. Unfortunately, the answers to logically and philosophically legitimate questions about the grounds of hope are not exactly compelling because they are looked for inside the individual. When asking about the reasons for hoping, thinkers search for the interior motives and reflexes of the one who hopes, but, as we will see shortly, hope is not grounded on something inside oneself.

Until then, let us evaluate a typical instance of this move:

Once we adopt a dualist theory of motivation, we can see that hope has the following structure: to hope for an outcome is to desire (be attracted to) it, to assign a probability somewhere between 0 and 1 to it, and to judge that there are sufficient reasons to engage in certain feelings and activities directed toward it. The element that unifies hope as a syndrome is this final element which I argue is a way of incorporating hope's other elements into one's rational scheme of ends.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *Believing in Order to See. On the Rationality of Revelation and the Irrationality of Some Believers*, Fordham University Press, 2017.

<sup>36</sup> A. Martin, *How We Hope*, pp. 7-8.

The so-called dualist theory of motivation, which is taken as a premise, is one according to which “we are capable both of representing an outcome as desirable (attractive) and of representing some of the outcome’s features—including our own desire for it—as providing or failing to provide reasons to pursue it.”<sup>37</sup> In fact, the “dualist” character of Martin’s theory which is meant to grant rationality to an inner pondering specific to hope and the unusual characterization of hope as a “syndrome” do not advance the examination. In fact, we are left with an even more complicated picture of what hope is:

Hope is thus a distinctive way of exercising one’s rational agency. It is a way of making an attractive outcome a part of one’s mental, emotional, and planning activities, without setting out to bring it about.

This is why I say hope is a distinctive way of incorporating one’s attraction to an outcome into one’s agency.<sup>38</sup>

One may say that, excepting the possibility of lacking want, we do not “set to bring about an outcome” simply because we can’t. But we hope that someone else could. This brings us to the important question of the external agency implied in hoping.

This is the concept employed by Ariel Meirav in a study<sup>39</sup> which deserves special attention. Criticizing what he calls the “Standard Account” of hope, he cautions that we have to distinguish between epistemic, physical and subjective probability. Indeed, this scruple would have made dozens of pages written on the subject of hope obsolete, since many of the complications alluded to are simply caused by bundling phenomena that may have been better kept apart. Meirav proposes instead an “External Factor Account.” He first notices that the desire involved in hope is “resignative”, which means that “it is more the desire of one who asks, or pleads, than of one who demands or simply takes.”<sup>40</sup> It is a desire for something that is beyond my powers, so I am led to resign to an external factor:

Provided that one takes it that *something* will determine causally whether the prospect will obtain or not (and that the prospect itself cannot play that role, i.e. it cannot cause itself to obtain), having resignative desire for the prospect implies acknowledging that something *distinct from oneself* (as well as from the prospect itself) will determine this. In other words, resignative desire involves some conception of an *external factor* (or indeed a plurality of such factors), distinct from both self and prospect, as possessing the power to determine causally whether or not the desired prospect will obtain. Indeed, it is *to* that external factor (i.e. in relation to it) that one might be said to resign.<sup>41</sup>

Two other things have to be specified, according to Meirav: the nature of this external factor and the conception the one who hopes has about the external factor. First,

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 69.

<sup>39</sup> Ariel Meirav, “The Nature of Hope”, *Ratio* (new series) XXII, 2 June 2009.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*.

it may appear as a person, a group of people or an institution (the doctors or the government being the author's examples), as fate or nature or it may be conceived in supernatural or religious terms. Secondly, the external factor operates in a manner that is either supportive of one's desires or not. If it is supportive, or viewed as good, one hopes. If not, one despairs. Meirav's eminent example to sustain his theory is the goodness of a nurse who, one hopes, will come to administer a painkiller. So, in order to hope, I have to think that she can benefit me, wants to benefit me and knows how to do so. In order to support his theory, Meirav needed to account for the goodness of an impersonal external factor, so he offers a risky generalization: "More generally, to think of an external factor, personal or impersonal, as good, is to think of it as operating *like* someone who, to a substantial degree, can benefit me, wants to benefit me, and knows how to do so"<sup>42</sup> (Meirav's emphasis). This is risky because it demands an anthropomorphism that threatens the demonstration. But, with some props, it will stand.

### WHY WE HOPE

After all that has been said, done and undone, we need to gather what we are left with and see what is missing. The biggest problem with all the theories analyzed is that they concentrate on an outcome and thus are absorbed by the prospect of obtaining it. But hope, although it concerns something that I don't have and I need, is felt in the present. It is in me, but not simply as a longing, nor as a result of interior deliberation. If hope is rational, and we have to trust the greatest minds in philosophy and say it is, this quality is not assured by the subject's decision, but by the fact that it does not contradict reason. So, it is in me, but, and this is very important, it requires trust, belief, faith and this normally involves another. We not only "trust that", "believe that" or have "faith that". We are not left completely alone with our own thoughts, for the same reason we are never in the possession of our own language. We have to have "trust in", "belief in" and "faith in".

Now, an even more important question than "For what do we hope?" or "How do we hope?" is "Why do we hope?" As strange as it may seem, this question is seldom asked in usual conversation and we have not found it directly asked in the texts we have studied. Hope is implicitly taken to be natural, just like other human feelings, but our contention here is that hope is not so natural, since it does not spontaneously arise inside a psyche. We hope because we are given hopes, because somebody *promised* something to us. We feel that Wittgenstein's intuition was right: only beings that master language can hope. We only need now to specify what function of language carries the particular conditions of hope.

This function was skillfully explored by John Austin<sup>43</sup> and John R. Searle<sup>44</sup>. Their profound analysis of "performative sentences" and "speech acts"<sup>45</sup> provides us with the

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>43</sup> John Austin, *How to do Things with Words*, Oxford University Press, 1962.

proper (philosophical) tools needed to give a proper account of hope, because saying ‘I promise...’ (and, with Austin’s favorite example, ‘I do...’ in a marriage ceremony) is really doing something. ‘I do...’ *is* marrying, or, more precisely, the initial act that produces the consequences and thus the reality that is called marriage. Likewise, ‘I promise...’ is the initial speech act that establishes a moral bond between humans and concomitantly the spiritual reality in which hope thrives. If anyone has doubts about the force of performatives, let it be noted that saying ‘I give...’ in front of a notary moves a house from one’s property to another’s.

Let us probe the consequences of this theory for hope.

First, measures like the ‘degrees’ of hope or probability calculus implied in ‘chances to obtain’ something don’t apply to this special ontological realm. Thinking about the chances of one’s keeping his word after a promise may determine a measure of trust in the person, not a measure of hope. In fact, hope arises only in a moral atmosphere saturated with trust. Or, to put it another way, the egg floats only when there is enough salt in the water. Thus, examples of usual instances of hope like ‘hoping that my sister will be at the station’, ‘hoping that his brother will help him’, ‘hoping that her husband will return’, ‘hoping that we will be as one’ really point to a relation, to a bond already established. My sister *said* that she will be at the station. His brother *said* that he will help him, and, if he did not say it this time, he is *bound* by the definition of fraternity to help him. Her husband originally *said* ‘I do...’ and now is *bound* by the marriage vow to return. Probably to the formulas ‘hope that’ and ‘hope in’ we need to add, for better precision, ‘hope within.’

Second, the particular kind of confidence on the part of the one who hopes corresponds to a degree of commitment on the part of the one who promises:

It follows from our analysis [...] that promising is, by definition, an act of placing oneself under an obligation. No analysis of the concept of promising will be complete which does not include the feature of the promisor placing himself under or undertaking or accepting or recognizing an obligation to the promisee to perform some future course of action, normally for the benefit of the promisee. One may be tempted to think that promising can be analyzed in terms of creating expectations in one’s hearers, or some such, but a little reflection will show that the crucial distinction between statements of intention on the one hand and promises on the other lies in the nature and degree of commitment or obligation undertaken in promising.<sup>46</sup>

So, in Meirav’s example with the nurse, it is not necessarily her goodness that invites hope on the part of the patient, but her professional obligation and, we easily imagine, the standard promise, almost a cliché, ‘I will check on you later.’ In fact, if an

<sup>44</sup> John R. Searle, *Speech Acts. An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge University Press, 1969.

<sup>45</sup> Both Austin and Searle spoke about “acts” with reference to performative sentences, although it is Searle who insisted on the syntagm “speech acts”. It is for very good reasons that the two are usually evoked together in studies on the philosophy of language.

<sup>46</sup> J.R. Searle, *Speech Acts*, p. 178.

action is for my benefit, the promisor is good, in a way, but when institutional roles are performed, his goodness is overwritten by an institutional commitment.

Third, Godfrey's distinction between "fundamental" hope and "ultimate" hope looks different and, we think, more precise, if we shift the accent from the one who hopes to the one who makes the promise. In Godfrey's words:

[...] a distinction becomes necessary [...], between two equally significant kinds of hope: hope that has an aim and is one's deepest hope – ultimate hope – and a kind of hope without aim, one which is a tone or basic disposition with which one faces the future – fundamental hope. The deep hoping of Bloch, Kant, and Marcel can be explored in this light, and their reflections clarify and give depth to the distinction and the structures that relate these two kinds of hope. These philosophers converge concerning the goal of hope: it has a social, not an individual form.<sup>47</sup>

After this change of accent, we can see that it is not two kinds of hope that we need to acknowledge, but two kinds of belief. Thus, the "fundamental hope", explained by Godfrey in terms of Abraham Maslow and Erik Erikson's theories is a kind of 'basic trust' on which psychologists speculate. But, if hope needs another to be completed, we need to wait for the child to develop the conscience of the other in order to properly speak about hope. This kind of hope is not "without an aim", which would be awkward, because it can't be hope yet. The "ultimate hope" leads Godfrey to speculate on a "hope for us" that can be added to a "hope for me". And it is true that Bloch, Kant and Marcel all agree about the fact that an "ultimate hope" is a "hope for us", i.e., it is concerned with humankind's wellbeing. But their philosophical horizons have different kinds of promisors: Bloch's is Marx; Kant's and Marcel's is God. Marx promised communism and God promised His Kingdom. Thus, it is no wonder that one kind of belief underlying hope is shakier than the other.

## CONCLUSION

Hope has a sort of firmness about it that has been noticed by many of the authors studied. In fact, it is the mysterious obstinacy of hope that still makes philosophers wonder about its source. James Dodd, for instance, meditates, in a typical manner, on the inwardness of the Dasein, turning the subject upon itself to the point of vertigo:

The moment of hope yields a space of lingering in a uniquely calm indifference to the burden of the projection of the Dasein itself. In other words, the project that Dasein is does not fully inhabit the space of the moment [...] The lightness experienced in hope can thus be thought of as something that belongs to a side of the subject that is never fully committed to its own self-projection but remains always as an excess free from the projection of an existence in the openness of possibility.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> J.J. Godfrey, *A Philosophy of Human Hope*, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> James Dodd, "The Philosophical Significance of Hope", *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 58, no. 1, Philosophy Education Society Inc., 2004, pp. 117–46, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20130425>, accessed 25 September 2021.

But the key to the tenacious character of hope will not be found following the inwardness path. It is the outwardness track that we have to follow in order to account for it. This way, we encounter the other as the source of hope. We have hopes not because they naturally stem from our depths, nor because they are a result of internal deliberation, but because we are given hopes.

We are given hopes by somebody who promises to give us what we need or to assist us achieve that. We hope not because we are certain of the outcome, but because we believed the words of somebody. In Austin's concise and beautiful phrase: "Accuracy and morality alike are on the side of the plain saying that *our word is our bond*."<sup>49</sup> (Austin's emphasis). We have hopes because we are in need, we have asked, or our need was evident, and the other promised.

<sup>49</sup> J. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, p. 10.