

Analysing Hope

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Abstract: The paper contrasts two approaches to the analysis of hope, one which takes its departure from a view broadly shared by Hobbes, Locke and Hume, another which fits better with Aquinas' definition of hope. The former relies heavily on a sharp distinction between the cognitive and conative aspects of hope. It is argued that while this approach provides a valuable source of insights, its focus is too narrow and it rests on a problematic rationalistic psychology. The argument is supported by a discussion of hope understood as a stance and by a consideration of the phenomenological contrast between expectation and anticipation. The paper concludes with some reflections on the relation between hope and illusion and the idea of responsible hope.

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The titles of two philosophical monographs on hope, *A Philosophy of Human Hope* by Joseph J. Godfrey and *A Philosophy of Hope* by Bernard Schumacher, play with a simple ambiguity.¹ On the one hand they announce that a particular theme or topic, hope, has been investigated as part of a particular field of enquiry, philosophy. Following the conventions for monographs of this sort, both books go through the main treatments of hope in the Western philosophical tradition, they identify a set of controversies arising from these accounts, and they offer their own proposals for dealing with the controversies. Each thus presents, in a quite straightforward

sense, “a philosophy of hope.” But the expression “a philosophy of hope” suggests another meaning which the authors also want to convey. According to this other meaning, hope is not just a self-contained theme of philosophical reflection, or a contingent object of philosophical analysis, but the organising idea for a whole philosophy. A philosophy of hope in this second sense is one characterised by a commitment to the centrality of hope. It still aims to improve our understanding of a given subject-matter, hope, but it raises the stakes by construing hope as a key to the understanding of other things. And there is the additional suggestion that a philosophy of hope will to some extent deliver what it is about: a philosophy of hope, in this sense, would be a source of hope, a “hope-maker” to adopt the parlance of current analytical philosophy. The ambiguity expressed in the phrase “a philosophy of hope” thus concerns the treatment of hope both as a discrete topic of philosophical analysis and as an organising philosophical idea. It invites us to think of hope as at once a *theme* and a *principle*.

The thinkers we most closely associate with the philosophy of hope – Ernst Bloch, Gabriel Marcel and Joseph Pieper, for instance – were concerned above all with hope considered as a principle.² Hope was a matter of “first philosophy” for them; that is, of significance for solving the basic problems (or deciphering the fundamental enigmas) of metaphysics, philosophical anthropology, and philosophy of history. For all the interest these thinkers still have for us, it is hard to see how the “principle of hope” can be made plausible in quite such an emphatic fashion today. Contemporary constructions of hope as a principle generally have more modest aims. Richard Rorty suggests one way of going about this when he advocates philosophical pragmatism under the motto “hope in place of knowledge.”³ A restricted (non-metaphysical)

philosophical anthropology which takes human beings as first and foremost “hoping subjects” offers another promising avenue.⁴ Other possibilities are explored by Godfrey and Schumacher in their own reflections on the philosophy of hope.

The most interesting and challenging philosophical questions about hope have to do with its status as principle. I will not, however, be dealing with such questions here – at least not directly. Rather I want to look at how hope has been thematised in philosophical discourse, and in particular I want to examine some of the strategies that have been used to analyse the mundane phenomena of hope and hoping. Not all the philosophers who have undertaken the task of analysing hope have wanted to elevate hope to the status of a principle. But most of those who have wanted to take that further step proceed on the basis of a prior philosophical analysis of everyday hoping. It is these preliminaries to a philosophy of hope, one that takes hope up as a principle, which concern me here.

My focus will be on attempts to map out the semantic content of the concept of hope by way of linguistic analysis.⁵ Conceptual analyses of hope are meant to be descriptive: their purpose is to throw light on what hope is by way of a clarification of what the concept of hope means. Their point of departure is how we ordinarily use the word hope, that is, how it features in ordinary language. It must be admitted that at its worst this kind of analysis can generate formalistic artifices, erstwhile criteria of correct usage which, while nice and tidy, seldom reflect the vibrant and often unruly behaviour of concepts in everyday life. Approaches that seek out necessary and sufficient conditions for the correct application of a concept – x is a case of y (for us, hope) if

and only if z – while seductive to the scientific mind, are particularly prone to this kind of distortion. But at its best linguistic analysis has precisely the opposite effect: it alerts us to the variety and richness of the phenomena and thus serves as a corrective to unwarranted formalisation and generalisation. It reminds us that the unity of the phenomenon, or the content of the concept, to be analysed cannot be presumed but must be established.

Just how difficult it is to establish in the case of hope is evident from the most advanced analyses that have been done on the concept. These analyses, which seek to explain the meaning of hope by identifying its essential components and the connections between hope and family-related concepts such as fear, despair, confidence, optimism, pessimism, and so forth, have reached a high level of sophistication and it would be impossible to do justice to them in all their detail here. Nevertheless I do propose that we distinguish between certain general explanatory strategies and I shall suggest that none of them is sufficient on their own. In other words, I recommend a pluralist approach to the analysis of hope.

While the goal of analysis is descriptive, it is far from being without normative purport. This is because lurking in the concept of hope are certain standards which any given attitude of hope, hopeful disposition, or act of hope can successfully meet or fail to meet. Another way of putting this thought is to say that the fact that we hope places us in “the space of reasons,” or perhaps better, our location in the space of reasons is made manifest in our hopes (amongst other things). This means that hopes are not just something we find ourselves with, like eyes of a certain colour, but something we are at some level, to some degree, responsible for. This in turn implies

that the hoper, particular hopes, and perhaps even hope itself, is at least in certain circumstances apt for criticism. A key motivation behind philosophical analyses of hope has been to clarify the basis of the criticisability of hope, and as I shall contend in my conclusion, the main approaches to the descriptive analysis of hope are bound up with distinct, and in certain cases incommensurable, normative standpoints of criticism.

Hobbes, Locke and Hume vs Aquinas

What does “hope” mean? Well, if we are puzzled by the meaning of a word, a sensible thing to do is to look it up in a dictionary. The OED defines hope as “expectation of something desired, a feeling of expectation and desire combined.” At first sight this summarises the various definitions of hope proposed by the great dead philosophers. Thus Aquinas defined hope as “a movement of appetite aroused by the perception of what is agreeable, future, arduous, and possible of attainment.”⁶ Hobbes boiled hope down to “appetite, with an opinion of attaining,” contrasted with despair, which is appetite “without such opinion.”⁷ According to Locke, “hope is that pleasure of the mind, which everyone finds in himself upon the thought of a probably future enjoyment of a thing which is apt to delight him,”⁸ a view refined but essentially endorsed in Hume’s definition of hope as the mixture of pleasure and pain that arises from the imagination of some pleasant but “only probable” future event.⁹

On closer inspection, however, the philosophers’ definitions of hope invite us to think about hope in ways which do not fit equally well with the dictionary definition. If Hobbes, Locke and

Hume are right, hope is directed at something one has “an opinion of attaining” or which one imagines will “probably” occur. It thus involves “expectation,” as the dictionary says. On the other hand, Aquinas understands hope as involving the “perception” (rather than “opinion”) of something which is merely “possible” of attainment. The connection with expectation here is less obvious (for reasons I will return to later) and there is no explicit reference to the probability of some desired outcome, just a perception of a possible future which is agreeable in some respect. The Aquinas definition doesn’t directly contradict the Hobbes-Locke-Hume definition but it does suggest a different strategy for explaining the meaning of hope. Whereas the Hobbes-Locke-Hume formulation invites us to focus on estimations of probability more or less explicit in beliefs or opinions concerning the satisfaction of a desire, the Aquinas formulation invites us to focus on the mere possibility of some agreeable future which is moreover “arduous” of attainment.

The most fully developed analysis of hope that takes its departure from the Hobbes-Locke-Hume formulation is Joseph Patrick Day’s. According to Day, the central insight captured in this view is that hope has both a *conative* and a *cognitive* aspect: conative insofar as hope always involves desire for something, cognitive insofar as hope also involves some estimation of probability. Day agrees that, from a psychological point of view, hope involves a feeling of pleasure (arising from the idea of proximity to some good), if one always mixed to some extent with pain (arising from the awareness that the good hoped for, the satisfaction of the desire, is still out of reach). This point is central to both Hume’s and Spinoza’s analysis of hope and Day takes it on board. But it does not follow, Day argues, that we should *identify* hope with such a

feeling or “passion,” as Hume and Spinoza mistakenly did. For this would amount to a version of the metonymic fallacy, of substituting a part for the whole, in this case losing sight of the cognitive significance of hope, which hope understood simply as a passion (even a mixed or compound one) cannot have.

To avoid that, Day proposes a shift from the psychological to the logical level of analysis. This involves grafting the psychological ingredients of hope identified by Hobbes-Locke-Hume onto a more fundamental analysis of the conceptual content of hope, as determined by the propositions that are logically equivalent to certain basic locutions containing the word hope. The conative *and* the cognitive aspects of hope can be expressed together, for example, by analysing the basic locution “A hopes that B” as entailing both “A desires that B” (the conative aspect) *and* “A believes that the probability of B is greater than zero (not impossible) but less than one (not actual or absolutely certain)” (the cognitive aspect). Day maintains that a congruent analysis holds for fear, which on his account (again following Hume and Spinoza) forms a continuum with hope. Thus the locution “A fears that B” entails and is entailed by “A desires that not-B but believes that the probability of B is greater than zero and less than one.” This means that, logically speaking, hope always has at least a trace of fear, and vice versa. Both hope and fear, on this account, involve entertaining a proposition, however implicitly or even unconsciously, regarding the probability of some desired state of affairs. They are propositional attitudes (more or less justified forms of cognition) which, being bound up with desire, also possess conative significance.¹⁰

At first glance this approach looks unduly rationalistic. While it seems uncontroversial to claim that hope has a conative aspect, that hoping involves desiring at some level, does hope really have the cognitive significance Day ascribes to it? Do we really entertain estimations of probability when we hope? Isn't hope more spontaneous and less a matter of rationality and calculation than this? Certainly there is a view, now quite widespread in the literature on hope, that hope should be separated from reason, calculation and considerations of probability altogether. Some go as far as to say that hope is "really hope" only when this is the case. Those who espouse this view are often orientated by the idea that we "hope against hope," which they interpret to mean that hope in spite of the evidence, in spite of probabilities and in spite of reason, actually brings us to the "essence" of hope.¹¹

But at least three reasons count against such a peremptory dismissal of what I have called the "Hobbes-Locke-Hume" approach to the analysis of hope. First, an acceptable analysis of hope has to be able to make sense of the fact that hope is by and large a matter of "more or less." We think of hope as going up and down, as increasing and diminishing, and the analysis we favour should provide some kind of explanation of what we mean when we express this thought. One way in which we do express it in ordinary language is by reference to the fervour of a hope. To say that "A fervently hopes that B" expresses the thought that A is "passionate" about B or "cares" for it a lot or has a strong desire for it. The fervour or enthusiasm of a hope can wax and wane, rise or dip, and in this respect the hope itself can be said to be a matter of degree. Considered in their *conative* aspect, we could say, hopes vary in their *intensity*. But is this the only dimension of variation? If hope were just a matter of desire, or if its analysis remained

exclusively at the conative level, this is what we would expect. This is because, as Day points out, possibility does not admit of degrees. There is no “more or less” corresponding to the possibility that B as there is for the desire that B. The hoper might have an idea or “perception,” as Aquinas put it, that B is “possible of attainment,” but *this* feature of the hope is not going to explain how hope comes in degrees. So the explanation of the various degrees of hope is stuck at the conative level.

By contrast, analysing hope as having a cognitive dimension in virtue of it involving estimations of probability opens up a second axis of variation. It enables us to make sense of variations in hope that depend on *how likely* the hoped for thing is reckoned to be. And this does seem to map on to another kind of contrast made in ordinary language, namely between “high” hope and “faint” hope. Admittedly the expression “high hope” does not always carry this meaning - it sometimes refers to the ambitiousness of a hope – but it often conveys the idea that the chances are reckoned to be good that the hoped for object will be attained. The relevant point is that chances, likelihoods, probabilities come in degrees – they can improve or deteriorate – and these can be tracked by subjective beliefs that in turn affect amounts of hope. The person with a high hope that B considers it “more than likely” that B will occur; or less colloquially, that the likelihood of B is considerably greater than not B. Perhaps more to the point, awareness of *greater* likelihood *heightens* a hope. Conversely, a faint hope involves a belief that the probability of some desired outcome is low; or as we also say, hopes are “dented” by “setbacks” which diminish chances of success. When we use the expression “some hope” Z will happen, we mean that it is unlikely to take place, however desirable it is. So just as hopes vary

conatively (in their degree of fervour or intensity), we can also now say that they vary in their cognitive aspect (according to the estimation of probability involved, or, so to speak, in their degree of magnitude). This way of analysing hope seems to be confirmed by the fact that the two axes of variation are at least in many cases independent. Thus one can have a fervent but faint hope for something one has a strong desire for but considers unlikely to happen, and one can have a high but mild hope for something one believes to have a good probability but about which one is not very passionate. It is also true, of course, that the cognitive and conative axes of variation can follow each other: one can come to want (and hope for) something more the more probable it becomes, or believe it less likely (and hope for it less) as desire for it diminishes. A congruent analysis can be given of fear, which seems to provide further confirmation of the appropriateness of this kind of approach.

A successful philosophical analysis of hope will not only give us a clearer view of the elements of hope, it will also enable us to make more fine-grained discriminations between hope and similar concepts. A second reason counting in favour of the Hobbes-Locke-Hume approach is that it does provide a schema for interpreting phenomena related to hope. Day makes a number of plausible suggestions in this regard. The idea that hope and fear form a continuum helps make sense of how hope can merge into fear, or flip into it, as beliefs about probability change more or less radically. For example, my hope of becoming an indispensable employee of a corporation can merge into fear of being made redundant as my beliefs slowly change about the likelihood of long-term continuous employment. Or fear of failing an exam can suddenly mutate into hope of success when I realise that the likelihood of failure is very low (I open the exam

paper, full of fear, and see that the questions are on the topics I revised). Day makes the observation that as a general rule, the difference between the locutions “A hopes that B” and “A is hopeful that B” can plausibly be interpreted as residing in the estimation of probability involved, where the latter (not the former) implies that the desired object is reckoned to be more likely than not. The disposition to be hopeful (or fearful), which is obviously variable, can then be distinguished both from occurrent (momentary) hopefulness and from the more general (more or less invariable) human disposition to hope (or fear). As Day insists, the disposition to be hopeful is related to optimism but must also be distinguished from it, as the latter, while a form of hopefulness rather than hope, is nevertheless an extreme form of it: hopefulness that *everything* turns out for *the best*. There is much more to be said about these and related distinctions; and more, I should say, than can be fitted into Day’s formulae for the basic locutions.¹² But Day’s analysis provides a sound platform to work on.

A third consideration counting in favour of Day’s analysis is that it provides a framework for evaluating hope and “family related” phenomena. It gives an account of what we might call the pathologies of hope; that is, the ways in which hope, hopefulness, optimism and so forth can go wrong, degenerate, become unacceptable, or fall short of some standard of appropriateness. As we would expect, it distinguishes two axes of evaluation. On the one hand, a hope may be unacceptable in its conative dimension, or in other words, on account of the nature of the desire involved. A malicious hope would be objectionable on this score. On the other hand, hopes and hopefulness can be criticised for being unrealistic or vain; that is, for being unreasonable. Such hopes fall short in their cognitive aspect. And at least in many cases, standing behind an

unrealistic hope is a false or deluded belief about probability. Such false beliefs or poor estimations of probability make the hope unreasonable. For example, if I live five miles from a train station, and leave my house five minutes before the train I hope to catch is due to depart, there is something wrong with my hope. The probability that I will get to the station on time is very low and that fact tells me a lot about what's wrong with my hope. But I might allow myself to believe the probability is higher because I really want to get that train. Hopes, hopefulness and optimism are vulnerable to forms of "wantfulness," as Day puts it, where the sheer desire for something to occur, or for things to turn out well, or for everything to turn out for the best, actually creates the belief that it is all likely to turn out the desired way, irrespective of the evidence. And really bad hopes may be objectionable on the two axes of evaluation at once. Perhaps a hope for a long life in which I never grow old is objectionable in this way - a vain hope in both senses of the word.

The Stance of Hope

So despite its rationalistic appearance, the Hobbes-Locke-Hume approach to hope has much going for it. Up to this point my emphasis has been on how it meets, or comes close to meeting, specific desiderata for an analysis of hope. It is now time to change emphasis and to turn to the limits and blind spots of this way of analysing hope. I'd like to do this by considering an actual conversation in which hope features in a remarkable and revealing manner. The conversation took place between Albert Speer and Hitler, in the Reich Chancellery bunker at the end of March 1945, with the Red Army closing in on Berlin. It was recorded by Speer in his memoirs

and is worth citing at length. After venting his anger at Speer for blocking his orders, Hitler calmed down and, “in a relaxed tone,” wrote Speer,

Hitler continued: “Speer, if you can convince yourself that the war is not lost, you can continue to run your office.”...

“You know I cannot be convinced of that,” I replied sincerely but without defiance. “The war is lost”.

Hitler launched into his reflections. He spoke of the other difficult situations in his life, situations in which all had seemed lost but which he had mastered by perseverance, energy, and fanaticism. He went on and on, forever, it seemed to me, carried away by his memories of the early days of struggle....

Now, since I remained silent and only looked steadily at him, he surprisingly lowered his demand: “If you would believe that the war can still be won, if you could at least have faith in that, all would be well.” He had passed into an almost pleading tone... Under other circumstances I would probably have weakened and given in. This time, what kept me from submitting to his spell was the thought of his destructive plans.

Agitated,... I said: “I cannot, with the best will in the world. And after all, I do not want to be one of the swine in your entourage who tell you they believe in victory without believing in it.”

... Once again Hitler reduced his demand to a formal profession of faith that would be binding upon me: “If you could at least hope that we have not lost! You must certainly be able to hope... that would be enough to satisfy me.”

I did not answer.

There was a long, awkward pause. At last Hitler stood up abruptly. Now he was very unfriendly again and declared with the sharpness he had shown at the beginning of the interview: “You have twenty-four hours to think over your answer! Tomorrow let me know whether you hope that the war can still be won.” Without shaking hands, he dismissed me.¹³

The story may not be true (we only have Speer’s word for it) but we shouldn’t let that spoil it for us. Some aspects of it illustrate the Hobbes-Locke-Hume analysis of hope rather nicely. The transition from being convinced, to belief, to hope is one we can easily recognise as reflecting diminishing degrees of subjective probability: we pass through them as we judge some objective or state of affairs increasingly less likely. Better to be convinced that the objective will be reached than to hope it will be, for that reflects a confident estimation that the probability is

high. But better to hope than not to hope, for that reflects an estimation that there is still some chance the objective will be reached. The probability of winning the war may be lower than it would take to convince Speer it will be won (he would need to reckon there was a high chance for that), and it may be lower than it would take for him to believe it (which would take a better than even chance). But if he could just hope he would have to reckon that there was at least a low chance of victory, and that is why Hitler would be satisfied with it. All would then not be lost. It is presumably something like the location of hope on the cognitive scale that Speer has in mind when he describes Hitler as “lowering his demand.” While it is of course absurd to call up certainty or belief on demand - as Speer protests they are hardly matters of will - the *facts* required for belief would be less “demanding” than for certainty but more “demanding” than for hope. Hitler speaks as if Speer’s certainty, belief and hope were proxies for the facts rather than attitudes towards them. But Hitler’s demand for hope clearly involves something more than the demand for certainty or belief (however absurd demand for them is), and perhaps it is this ambiguity which allows Hitler menacingly to settle for it. For the force of the question about Speer’s hope might not so much concern his *beliefs* about the *probability* of victory as his *desire* that the war be won. Speer was therefore wise not to answer, as a negative response to this question could be taken to mean that he no longer wanted a German victory, and so no longer sided with Hitler. From this point of view the “demand” on Speer has actually been heightened with the question of his hope, as he now has to bring his conative as well as cognitive faculties, his heart as well as his mind, into line. Day’s analysis of hope thus helps to explain an aspect of Speer’s predicament.

At the same time, this exchange about hope has a sense, over and above the pathos, which we would not expect if the Hobbes-Locke-Hume approach told the whole story. According to Day's analysis, a subjective probability (that is, a belief, judgement, opinion, estimate, guess directed at some probability) is essential for hope: "A hopes that B" entails "A desires B and A estimates that the probability that B is greater than 0 and less than 1." But if that were the case, it would be sheer nonsense for Hitler to ask: "even though the situation looks impossible, do you still have hope?" Such a locution might not be especially rational or reasonable, but it is by no means unintelligible. And although Hitler may in fact have been manipulating words to evince a "formal profession of faith that would be binding" on Speer, there was surely nothing absurd in his demand that Speer make up his mind about whether or not he hoped. The counterfactual is not inconceivable in which Speer decided he could sincerely avow his hope even though he had no expectation whatsoever that the war would be won. Would we make sense of that by saying that such an avowal of hope was *just* an expression of desire? I think not. Nor, I think, would we be forced into saying that it was hope with the belief in the middle taken out, a cognitively hollow hope as it were (though it might be that). We would rather take into consideration the context of the decision facing Speer, which was not (or at least not just) about whether, inside, he really wanted x or really believed that x. It was not just a matter of coming up with a sincere report about his private mental states. What was at stake beyond this (leaving to one side the peculiar communicative ethics of the Nazis – the binding formal professions of faith - and Speer's interest in saving his own skin) was a decision about whether to take up the *stance* of someone who hopes. And the adoption of such a stance would have had a significance that held

independently of what those beliefs and desires were. This seems to imply that one can adopt the stance of hope without it entailing commitment to a determinate set of desires and beliefs.

The focus on desire and belief which shapes the whole Hobbes-Locke-Hume approach to the analysis of hope neglects the part played by adopting a stance which, as Speer's predicament illustrates, can be crucial for understanding the meaning of hope. And it is hardly surprising that the approach works best when the desire in terms of which a hope is analysed is relatively simple and belief involves a clear cut estimation of probability. It explains perfectly well why the gambler's hope that he will throw a six is lower but more fervent than his hope that the die will land even: he knows that the probability is less but he wants it more because the winnings will be higher. The analysis can then be extended to contexts of hope where probabilities are less easy to determine, estimate or judge, by loosening up the meaning of probability and belief. Day allows, for instance, that the beliefs involved in a hope can be half-formed, opaque, or even unconscious. The problem however is that the philosophical psychology of the Hobbes-Locke-Hume view is ill-equipped to explain (never mind describe) this level of psychic life, and arguably must be so long as this level is regarded as secondary to, or a contingent departure from, a more basic cognitive model.

It is also important to see that adoption of a stance of hope can involve not so much commitment to a belief about probability (however inarticulate, unreflective or unconscious) as acknowledgement that such a commitment would be out of place. We hope not only when we are uncertain about the future, but when we have next to no idea about what the future will

bring. Acknowledgement of our ignorance of likelihoods, of our vulnerability to sheer contingency, rather than a particular assessment of the contingencies, gives certain hopes their specific shape. At a loss to how things will turn out, one plunges in, in the hope that something good will come of it. Estimates of probability might be out of place because we do not know enough; our understanding is too limited to judge one way or another. Or they may be out of place because we have no clear understanding of what would count as a fulfilment of the hope. This is no small matter as it is in just such circumstances that use of the word “hope” can be most apposite. If, say, I am considering marriage, I might adopt a stance of hope, yet be unable to envisage the future state of affairs in which I could say that the object of the hope had been realised. It is completely intelligible in that context for me to tell someone “I hope I’ve made the right decision” even if I am at a loss to say what would *make* it right. The moments on which lives turn, their hinge points as it were, are times of hope and fear if any are. Estimates of probability in such contexts of hope are both unreasonable and beside the point. Admittedly, it follows that hopes of this kind cannot be raised or lowered as the chances of success are reckoned to be increased or diminished. We have to conceive the vicissitudes of such hopes in different terms.

The Experience of Hope

We have seen that the distinction between the conative and cognitive dimensions of hope is useful for certain purposes of analysis. But we must also treat it with great caution. According to the Hobbes-Locke-Hume view, the distinction maps onto a psychological distinction between

desire and belief (broadly understood), and it finds its way into the OED definition of hope as expectation (belief that x is probable) combined with desire. It can seem natural then to suppose that this provides the right framework for understanding the phenomenology of hope, that is, for describing how hope is experienced. But this step soon leads to problems.

The analysis of hope given by Jayne Waterworth helps us to see what these problems are. She draws a sharp distinction between expectation and anticipation, and argues that only the latter is part of the phenomenology of hope.¹⁴ There are two aspects to expectation which are also reflected in its etymology: “looking out for” and “awaiting.” If I put the kettle on and go back into the study, after a few minutes I “look out for” the sound of the whistle and “await” it. I expect the kettle to boil. If I order a taxi for a certain time and know the service to be reliable, I look out for it and await its arrival close to the appointed time. Given what I know (or reasonably believe on the basis of experience, testimony, etc) about the taxi service I expect it. I am relatively certain it will come and so can just wait. I would not expect the arrival of the taxi if I had serious doubts about the reliability of the service, that is, if I had a low estimation of the probability of a timely arrival. I may still “look out for” for the taxi but would not “await” it as I would if I expected it. To give another example, if I allow myself to be refused a vacant seat on the grounds that the person sitting next to it is “expecting someone,” I assume that the seat is as good as occupied, that it is *about* to be filled. A different nuance, which is perhaps even more telling in its own way, is conveyed when we say that a pregnant woman is “expecting.” For the meaning carried here is that a natural process is underway which can now be left to run its course. Though the outcome of course is far from inevitable, nature has now taken over. In

general, then, we can say that we expect things we regard as very likely to happen, and this assurance allows the subject who experiences expectation to take a certain distance from its environment, to stand back and wait for events to take their course, so to speak, while looking out for the expected outcome.

The experience of expectation can now be contrasted with that of anticipation. Whereas the etymological roots of expectation lie in the idea of “looking out for” and “awaiting,” those of anticipation lie in “seizing or taking possession beforehand,” and the protensive engagement of the self in its environment implied in the latter meaning provides a key to the phenomenological difference between them. For the “seizing in advance” that marks anticipation involves a projection of one’s *self* into the future such that one is united with some objective. The anticipating subject lacks the assurance about outcomes that the expecting subject possesses. When I anticipate something, the future appears uncertain and, in a way that contrasts with expectation, *down to me*. Whereas the subject who expects stands back, observes, and awaits, the subject who anticipates is from the beginning saturated, so to speak, with a *readiness for action*. Anticipation thus involves an active “taking up” of a stance and a projective preparedness which reflects the subject’s immersion in and engagement with the environment. This structure of anticipation has been analysed extensively and in considerable detail by psychologists and philosophers. But let me give a simple homely example just to illustrate the main point. If I go to bed at night expecting my husband to snore, I lie there awake “looking out for” and “awaiting” it. But I can change this expectation to anticipation if I take a plan to the bedroom, say to lever him up on his side when the breathing gets heavy. The expecting and the

anticipating subject both lie there sleepless in the dark, but their connection to the proximate future, and on that account their way of being in the present, is quite different.

Once the contrast between the experience of expectation and anticipation is spelled out in this way, it seems clear that it is the latter that belongs to the phenomenology of hope. Insofar as we are able to speak in general terms about “experience of hope,” it is more accurate to describe it as an anticipation of something, in the sense of seizing it in advance and projectively uniting ourselves with an objective of which we are uncertain (and perhaps even unconscious), than to say it is an expectation of something in the sense of “looking out for” some specified event and awaiting its occurrence. The ease with which we use the expression “hopeful anticipation,” in contrast to the awkwardness of “hopeful expectation,” reinforces this point. Waterworth is thus right to say that the OED definition of hope is misleading. She correctly points out that the experience of hope is characterised by a felt uncertainty about the future which is alien to the experience of expectation. Admittedly, Day’s analysis does not contradict Waterworth’s here, as he too stresses the aspect of uncertainty involved in hope (without linking it to the experience of anticipation as such). But there is more to this uncertainty than either analysis manages to bring out. This is the quality of doubt that belongs at least in many cases to the phenomenology of hope. The person who hopes typically has a certain kind of doubt which we could provisionally characterise as *suspense*. When we hope, the future infiltrates the present with an indeterminacy that leaves us *presently* in suspense. This is the phenomenological counterpart to the feature of hope I touched on before, that rather than being cognisant of the weight of probability favouring one outcome rather than another, or lending itself to belief rather than disbelief, the hoper may

be forced to suspend the cognitive commitments normally tied to belief. This does not leave the “conative” aspect of hope untouched, for it inflects the actual experience of the hoper as a subject with future-oriented concerns.

The substitution of anticipation for expectation for the purpose of better describing the experience of hope (the hoping subject) therefore also casts a different light on the practical purport of hope (the hoping agent). On the Hobbes-Locke-Hume view, the ultimate ground of practical purport is desire or “appetite,” which is in principle separable from the agent’s cognitive orientation. But once we accept that hope involves anticipation rather than expectation, we are led to consider hope first as something we do, as an active orientation, a stance we take up and not just a feeling to be suffered or enjoyed; and second, as an integrated *expression* of desire rather than a contingent combination of desires and independently determinable opinions, beliefs or expectations.

Of course Phenomenologists have been making points like this against empiricist and rationalist psychology for a long time. They insist that the human subject must be considered as a totality, as an indivisible “being in the world,” as an embodied being at grips with and concerned by the world. Only in this way can we give accurate descriptions of the varieties of human experience and a plausible account of their origins and development. Phenomenology thus provides a quite different agenda to the analysis of hope than that provided by the logical analysis of the concept under empiricist premises. For the phenomenologist, the goal of such an analysis must be to describe in a manner as faithful to the phenomena as possible the lived experience of hope. And

this would mean attending to hope as it is concretely manifest in the embodied experience of living subjects. It would require fine-grained descriptions of the varieties of the hoping stance; that is, of a pre-reflective structure of experience which is prior to, and conditional of, the representation of things through conceptually contentful beliefs, opinions, expectations, and so forth. But this project should not be thought of as *replacing* the logical analysis of hope, which properly understood serves different purposes. Just as the phenomenological critique of representationalism in philosophy is not directed at the capacity for representation as such, but the priority given to it in the explanation of knowledge and meaning, so a phenomenological critique of the Hobbes-Locke-Hume analysis of hope should be directed not at the role played by cognition in hope, but at the sharp separation it imposes between the cognitive and the conative dimension. As we have seen from our consideration of Day's analysis of hope, there are real insights to be gained from this approach, regarding the meaning of basic locutions involving hope, the explanation of degrees of hope, and the relations between hope, hopefulness, optimism etc. But these insights must be salvaged from the dualistic empiricist psychology that underpins that Hobbes-Locke-Hume approach to hope.

And what about the Aquinas view? There is something going for this too. Day criticises Aquinas' definition of hope for failing to make sense of degrees of hope, which the Hobbes-Locke-Hume view, with its emphasis on subjective probability, is able to do. But we also saw that there are contexts of hope in which estimations of probability are either inappropriate or beside the point, in which a mere sense of the openness of the future, of possibility, is what we

require. Aquinas' definition fits such contexts much better than Hobbes-Locke-Hume (and for that matter the OED) definition.

We have only touched indirectly on the second distinctive feature of Aquinas' definition of hope, that it is aroused by the perception of something agreeable but "arduous" of attainment. This aspect of Aquinas' definition has been criticised for unduly restricting the scope of hope, as if goals attainable without arduousness cannot also fall within it. This objection is consistent with a widely held view that just about anything can be an object of ordinary, everyday hope. People hope for trivial things (say, for a flavour of ice cream) as well as lofty things (say, for world peace), but they are all just as much hopes for that. This suggests that it is as futile characterising ordinary hope in terms of its object as it is pointless characterising desire that way. The analysis of hope reveals a certain subjective relation to the object of hope (that it is welcome/agreeable, anticipated/expected, uncertain/probable), but has little of interest to say (according to this view) about *what* it is we ordinarily hope for. The problem with Aquinas' "arduous" clause, it can then be argued, is that Aquinas really has something other than mundane hope in mind. And Aquinas' apparent exclusion of many ordinary hopes in his definition has indeed been explained by his overriding concern with Christian religious hope, and the effort that must be exerted to attain the goal of that hope: life after death in heaven. However, I do not think we need seek an ulterior motive to make sense of Aquinas' proposal. For we do not normally say that we hope for *anything* we happen to desire and of which we are uncertain or anticipate in some way. In most contexts, an avowal of hope signifies not just an expression of desire for something uncertain, but an *investment* of desire which projects the self

into an uncertain future. In saying “I hope,” as distinct from “I want” or “I wish,” I signal that something has a particular significance for me, even if it might seem quite trivial taken out of context. And it is this investment of desire which Aquinas’ point about ardour brings into the picture. Aquinas’ definition reminds us that hopes *characteristically* need to be *worked on*. And this means that they characteristically have a *history*. This history is of course nothing other than the history of the person who hopes, and the hopes of a person, precisely in virtue of the “arduousness” and so temporality of their attainment, enable the person to track that history. A person’s hopes provide crucial reference points in relation to which the direction of a life can be gauged: they press upon us, as it were, biographical narratives of success and failure, of victory and defeat, which we can turn to for making sense of our lives.¹⁵ For this reason hopes may provide a key to our past as well as our future.

Responsible Hope

As I said in the introduction, the clarification of what we mean when we use the concept of hope is only part of the philosophical motivation for analysing hope. Philosophers who have undertaken this descriptive task have also wanted to derive from it some standard that can be employed in the evaluation of hope. That is to say, philosophical analyses of hope are typically done with a view to providing some rational basis for distinguishing between “good” and “bad” hope, between hopes and hopeful dispositions we are entitled to, or even ought to have, and those we can in some sense be criticised for having. Some hopes are more worth having, are of more value, than others, and it seems natural then to enquire about the standard or standards that

enable us to pick out the better or worse ones. Throughout this paper I have tried to bring out the strengths and weaknesses of the main strategies that have been adopted for descriptively analysing hope. I would like to conclude by indicating how these strategies are connected to particular standpoints of normative evaluation.

While the Hobbes-Locke-Hume approach to the analysis of hope acknowledges that a hope can be objectionable on account of the kind of desire that informs it, the critical thrust of the analysis is directed unmistakably at the *human propensity towards error*. This propensity is manifest above all in the cognitive shortcomings that commonly afflict hopes. It is of course a more general characteristic of the philosophical systems of Hobbes, Locke and Hume that they seek to explain the whole gamut of metaphysical and moral illusions by reference to a natural human propensity of this kind. This makes the approach well suited for critically analysing hope as a source of illusion.¹⁶ Hope understood as a source of illusion – and a very pervasive one at that – is of moral significance because in having such hope we allow ourselves *to be fooled*. And this is reprehensible. It is always better not to be fooled than to be fooled, and we can avoid being fooled (or being deluded) in our hopes by taking more responsibility for our beliefs. In particular, we should be more careful about the estimations of probability we attach to the future fulfilment of our desires. As Day's analysis demonstrates, unrealistic or irrational beliefs about probability inform many if not all futile hopes. From the normative standpoint of "self-responsible reason," such hopes must be condemned.

But if our location in the space of reasons – and on that account our accountability to a norm of self-responsible reason - is partly manifest in the more or less articulated estimations of probability that contribute to our hopes, it is by no means the only way in which we are situated there in virtue of our hopes. For the reasonableness of a hope is also a matter of acknowledging the limits of our powers of estimation. It can involve acknowledgement of the non-estimability of the likelihood of a hoped for objective rather than just an acknowledgement of uncertainty about the objective. The acknowledgement of finitude – which can itself be considered as a demand of reason - makes room for hope independent of considerations of probability.¹⁷ Furthermore, the historicity of our hopes (the fact they have a history) lends them an intelligibility which requires them to be situated in a space of *non-instrumental* reasons. They emerge, develop and die, not for the most part arbitrarily, but in response to changing aspirations and the succession of significant victories and defeats on which life narratives often hang. It is important to see that a norm of self-responsible reason is at work even here, albeit in a more expansive version than we find in the Hobbes-Locke-Hume approach to hope. For the central normative idea now is not so much *avoidance of illusion* as the *education of hope*. The education or maturation of hope may involve the correction of unrealistic estimations of probabilities in certain contexts, but it is not restricted to that function. Furthermore, the education of hope should be seen as a complex learning process directed by multiple standards, not all of which may be commensurable with the standard of self-responsible reason. Thus it requires the development of our powers of creative imagination, so that hopes are not foreshortened by what seems reasonable or rational by current standards. Or the education of hope may involve a learning process that opens the self up to the “gift” of the other, thereby

running into conflict perhaps with the standpoint of *self*-responsible reason. Or it might involve acquisition of a competence in the practice of “taking up the stance” of hope, and a strengthening of the virtue of courage which might in certain contexts be at odds with prudence.

So the pluralism I have been recommending for the purposes of descriptively analysing hope also extends to the task of evaluatively analysing it. The notion of educated hope bridges the two kinds of analysis. The idea of educated hope lies at the heart of the great philosophies of hope that elevate hope to the status of a principle.¹⁸ As I mentioned in the introduction, the question of how to interpret the “principle of hope” today is of greater significance and is a greater challenge for the philosophy of hope than the problems of analysing hope. But it is the latter that I have sought to shed some light on in this essay.

Endnotes

¹ See J. J. Godfrey, *A Philosophy of Human Hope*, Dordrecht, Martinus Nijhof, 1987; and B. Schumacher, *A Philosophy of Hope*, trans. D. G. Schindler, New York, Fordham University Press, 2003.

² See E. Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 3 vols, trans. N. Plaice, S. Plaice and P. Knight, Oxford, Blackwell, 1986; G. Marcel, *Homo Viator. Introduction to a Metaphysic of Hope*, trans. E. Crawford, London, Victor Gollancz, 1951; J. Pieper, *Hope and History*, trans. R. and L. Winston, London, Herder and Herder, 1969.

³ See R. Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1999. German and French editions of essays contained in this book were published as *Hoffnung statt Erkenntnis* and *L'espoir au lieu de savoir*.

⁴ For a sketch of how the principle might be developed in this direction see G. Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism – searching for hope in a shrinking society*, Annandale, Pluto Press, 2003.

⁵ See J. P. Day, *Hope. A Philosophical Inquiry*, Helsinki, Acta Philosophica Fennica, vol. 51, 1991; and J. Waterworth, *A Philosophical Analysis of Hope*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

⁶ T. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, cited by Day, op cit, p. 27.

⁷ T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. Macpherson, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, I, 6.

⁸ J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P. Nidditch, Oxford, Clarendon, 1975, Bk II, Ch XX.

⁹ D. Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, second edition, ed. P. Nidditch, Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 440. Spinoza defined hope in a similar way as the feeling of “an inconstant joy” aroused by “the image of a future or past thing whose outcome we doubt.” B. de Spinoza, *The Ethics and Other Works*, ed. E. Curley, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 165 (Bk II/155).

¹⁰ See Day, op cit, p. 61.

¹¹ As Isabelle Strengers put it in an interview: “If we follow probability there is no hope,” in M. Zournazi ed., *Hope – new philosophies for social change*, Annandale, Pluto Press, 2002, p. 245.

¹² Amongst the further subtleties to attend to is the paradox wonderfully observed by Jonathan Rée, that it is hard to conceive of a more pessimistic outlook than that of the optimist who holds that this is the best of all possible worlds. After all, this implies that nothing could have turned out any better. See J. Rée, “Trust me I’m a pessimist,” blog posted 13th October 2006, BBC 3, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/freethinkinguk>.

¹³ A. Speer, *Inside the Third Reich: Memoirs by Albert Speer*, tr. R. and C. Winston, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971, p. 452-3.

¹⁴ See Waterworth, *op cit*, p. 8ff.

¹⁵ See A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, second edition, London, Duckworth, 1984.

¹⁶ Not that there are no other philosophical systems that lend themselves to this kind of critical analysis of hope. Compare Schopenhauer: “*Hope* is to confuse the desire that something should occur with the probability that it will. Perhaps no man is free from this folly of the heart, which deranges the intellect’s correct estimation of probability to such a degree as to make him think the event quite possible, even if the chances are only a thousand to one. And still, an unexpected misfortune is like a speedy death-stroke; while a hope that is always frustrated, and yet springs into life again, is like death by slow torture” (A. Schopenhauer, *Psychological Observations in Essays of Schopenhauer*, trans. Mrs Rudolf Dircks). In hope, then, the world as Will (its conative aspect) is dominant over the world as Representation (its cognitive aspect) in especially vicious fashion.

¹⁷ See Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (A805/B833) where Kant associates the question “for what may I hope?” with one of the three fundamental “interests of reason.” See also Paul

Ricoeur, "Hope and the Structure of Philosophical Systems," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, XLIV, 1970, 55-69.

¹⁸ See especially Bloch, *op.cit.*