

Hope in a Democratic Age

ALAN MITTLEMAN



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HOPE
IN A
DEMOCRATIC AGE
Philosophy, Religion, and
Political Theory

ALAN MITTLEMAN

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UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
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New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

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Published in the United States
by Oxford University Press Inc., New York

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First published 2009

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Library of Congress Control Number: 2008942639

Typeset by SPI Publisher Services, Pondicherry, India
Printed and Bound in the UK
on acid free paper by
MPG Biddles Ltd.

ISBN 978-0-19-929715-3

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Acknowledgements

Discussions with many students, friends, and family members contributed to the writing of this book. Among them are Allan Arkush, David Novak, Leora Batnitzky, Lenn Goodman, Marty Plax, Sharon Portnoff, Jonathan Jacobs, Nancy Berlinger, Eric Cohen, Alan Mintz and Ismar Schorsch, Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks, Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, Revd William A. Johnson, Revd Walter Wagner, Philip Hamburger, Johannes Brosseder, Raphaela Schmid, Hannes Stein, Steven Grosby, Bill Galston, Os Guinness, and Kim Zafran, as well as Patti, Ari, and Joel Mittleman, the lights of my life.

This book is dedicated to the memory of my sister, Sharon Sarill (1959–2005), a dear soul who was full of hope until the end and whom I dearly miss. May her memory be a blessing and may her hopes be fulfilled in the lives of her children, my nephew and niece, Miles and Kiera Sarill.

A.M.

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Introduction

Mine is the faith that I will surely see the Lord's goodness in the land of the living. Hope in the Lord and be strong. Hope in the Lord and take courage.

Ps. 27: 13–14

Abandon every hope, who enter here.

Dante

What does it mean to hope? Is to hope simply to wish, to desire, to dream? Is hope an easy or an idle thing, or is it strenuous and disciplined? Does hope imply that one consorts with illusion and consigns reason to irrelevance or does hope work in tandem with a rational assessment of the possibilities of life? Does hope pick up at the limits of human agency? Does it signify the triumph of fancy over prudence? Or does it fall on the near side of the narrow ridge between reality and fantasy?

As always, literature sheds light on our conceptual perplexities. Let us begin with a classic text from the Western literary canon, Dante's *Inferno*. Dante writes in the third Canto of the *Inferno* of the inscription that stands over the gate of Hell:

Through me the way into the suffering city,
Through me the way to the eternal pain,
Through me the way that runs among the lost.
Justice urged on my high artificer;
My maker was divine authority,
The highest wisdom, and the primal love.
Before me nothing but eternal things

Were made, and I endure eternally.
Abandon every hope, who enter here.¹

Immediately we learn, if Dante is correct, that hope is no mere spontaneous emotion. It is something that can be or ought to be responsive to reasons. Hope should be abandoned, if the circumstances warrant it. Hope should comply with reason to some extent. When one passes through the gates of Hell, one loses all reason to hope. A reasonable (although wicked!) person, would have to relinquish it. Thus, to think about hope requires that one consider the relation of emotion—if that is, indeed, what hope is—to reason. Hope, qua emotion or passion, relates to reason; it rests on the ability to size up one's situation.

To hope requires the possibility of change; that there be alternatives to one's present circumstances. If there is nothing but eternal sameness, eternal Hell, even eternal return, there is no ground for hope. The damned in Dante's inferno, reporting on the reasons for their eternal imprisonment, say: 'We have no hope, and yet we live in longing.'² Is hope not the same as longing? Dante, like Thomas Aquinas before him, believes that hope is not mere desire; it is desire with the possibility of fulfilment. The damned can wish for, desire, or dream of release, but, in the sense that Dante or Aquinas use the term, they cannot hope for it. They cannot hope for it because there is no realistic means by which they can fulfil their hope. Longing is spontaneous and cheap. Hope is cultivated and arduous, in this view. The damned must bow to the justice of God that put them in the inferno. They may long and wish, but they know that they are damned and only one future awaits them. 'Nor do they who descend into the Pit hope for Your grace' (Isa. 38: 18). They cannot hope. There is no hope in hell. Hell *is* hopelessness.

Wishing or longing, the one mental avenue left to the damned, is feckless. The denizens of the inferno can no longer act. They cannot be moral agents; they cannot change their world in any meaningful way. They exhausted their capacity as agents on the other side of the grave. This is an important dimension of their hopelessness. To hope requires not only the possibility of change but the possibility of action

¹ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1995), 68.

² *Ibid.* 73.

to effectuate change. Desire daydreams; hope issues in a course of action. One may take action oneself, if circumstances allow, or one may hope that another takes action on one's behalf. A person of biblical faith hopes that God will take action on his or her behalf. All of these are closed to Dante's infernal damned. Virgil can comfort Dante with words that he cannot apply to himself: 'But you wait here for me, and feed and comfort your tired spirit with good hope, for I will not abandon you in this low world.'³ Dante can hope to get through the inferno safely. Virgil can no longer hope for anything; his punishment is 'crippled hope'.⁴

In this literary text and, as I will argue, in life, hope is related to reason in the sense of rational assessment of one's situation and rational prediction of one's chances. It is related to action, in the sense that hope implies agency in the pursuit of change. It is related as well to certainty and uncertainty. Dante's damned souls have certainty: the dreadful certainty of eternal punishment. They know that nothing will ever change for them, for God's justice has decreed their immutable fate. Under conditions of certainty, there is nothing to hope for.⁵ If one is certain that a given outcome is necessary or inevitable, hope makes no sense. The incapacitation of hope cuts both ways. Hope can be defeated by the certainty of a negative outcome: an always fatal disease running its course; a last appeal for clemency denied; a battle against overwhelming force. But hope can also be depleted of its significance by the certainty of a positive outcome. This produces a tension in Christian theology, where hope—according to Peter Lombard, for example—is the '*certain* expectation of future glory'. If it were true, as some Christian theologians maintained, that faith gives certainty of salvation, then what could one hope for? If one knows that one has been saved, it might be beside the point to hope for salvation. Does hope imply uncertainty and therefore weakness of

³ Ibid. 93.

⁴ Ibid. 94.

⁵ In purgatory, in contrast to the inferno, the souls lack certainty as to when they shall be redeemed and attain paradise. Hence, prayer is possible for them, as is hope (see *ibid.* 240). How is it then with paradise? Dante is consistent. The dwellers in paradise have the certainty of salvation, therefore hope is not proper to them. They praise hope as God's gracious gift to mortal humanity but do not, I think, practise it themselves. Dante is interrogated by St James in the *Paradisio* (canto XXV) on the source and meaning of hope and is praised as one whose hope is unexcelled by other humans. This is possible because he is still alive; he remains an agent (see *ibid.* 498–9).

faith? That is not an orthodox conclusion—far from it. But it does underscore the tensions among hope, faith, and knowledge. Hope and uncertainty are mutually implicated. In the theological appropriation of hope, the tension between uncertainty (which is hope's natural element) and the certainty of faith can become problematic. We have then to ask at a deeper level what certainty in relation to hope might mean. The Christian answer seems to be that hope is proleptic. To hope is to participate, in an initial way, in the unfolding of God's truth—in the anteroom, so to speak, of God's presence. To hope is to know and to accept God's offer of life.

To return to a more secular appraisal of the relation of hope and certainty, although we may be certain of the outcome of a future event or state (at least in the sense of its having the highest probability) there are always ancillary possibilities about which we cannot be certain. We may be certain, to the use the above examples, that the cancer will kill us or the execution will proceed or that we will lose on the field of battle, but we do not know whether we will confront our disease, our fate, or our enemy courageously or with cowardice. We do not know whether we will have a noble death or an ignoble one. Often, when other avenues are closed to overt action, and hence to robust hope, we can still find small but quite significant avenues of agency. These then become loci of hope. The objects narrow and shrink but the possibility of hope remains. Short of damnation in Dante's hell, there are few circumstances that are truly hopeless. A margin of hope endures.

But should it? Does hope become an obsessive-compulsive habit when we cling to it under circumstances so adverse that abandonment of hope best conduces to dignity—should the noble resignation of the Stoic replace desperate hope? Or is it a question of choosing our hopes, of giving up on the big ones and finding small ones? Is it a question of rationally delimiting the proper objects of hope? Or is it a question of jettisoning the habit, one might say uncharitably, the compulsion of hope altogether; of accepting finality and fate; of accepting a moment beyond hope? This question leads us into the deepest levels of our inquiry. It leads us into the background beliefs—into the narratives—that give coherence to hope.⁶ To hope is to assume or to affirm a vision of the world that places human (and, for religious Jews and Christians,

⁶ On the role of narrative in sustaining hope, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1984), 204 ff. On hope as sense-making in a narrative context, see also Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural*

divine) agency and the confidence that attends agency at the centre. It is a vision, supported by a story, in which time is open to change. Such change has significance. It is not trivial or random. It works in the direction of liberation, emancipation, or enhancement of the life-giving and meaning-sustaining forces that support flourishing human life. This vision is incompatible with fatalism, and with the moral attitudes, well captured by Stoic ethics, that complement such metaphysics. In hoping, we take a metaphysical stand. We assert the reality of a certain kind of world. To explore hope, then, is to explore what Kant called the ‘metaphysics of morals’, the deep background assumptions about the nature of reality that provide a context for our moral beliefs and practices. Kant himself counted the question ‘What may I hope for?’ among those that generated his epochal inquiry into knowledge, conduct, and human destiny.⁷

The metaphysical question returns us to the relationship of hope and reason at a deeper level. Granted that hope is—that the emotions generally (we defer to the next chapter the discussion of whether hope is best construed as an emotion) are—related to reason,⁸ are we able to interrogate the rationality of an underlying vision or world picture? If a hard determinist or fatalist view of reality is correct, then hope per se is an irrational activity. What is the warrant for hope? People of biblically derived faiths hold world pictures in which hope is warranted. But whether their world pictures are themselves warranted is another question. Some, such as the late Richard Rorty, would dismiss this question about the warrant for a vision, for evidence of the

Devastation (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006). On narrative and hope in the American national context, see Andrew Delbanco, *The Real American Dream: A Meditation on Hope* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999). For a theological exposition of narrative and hope, see Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (South Bend, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1981).

⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1965), 635 (A 805; B 833). See also Jürgen Moltmann, ‘Progress and Abyss: Remembrances of the Future of the Modern World’, in Miroslav Volf and William Katerberg (eds.), *The Future of Hope: Christian Tradition amid Modernity and Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004), 11.

⁸ If I respond with anger to an insult, for example, it is because I have interpreted what someone has said to me as a remark of a certain kind. I have, that is, made a judgement, which may or may not have been correct. Regardless of its correctness, however, it is something for which I can produce reasons. Hence, it is misleading to draw too sharp a distinction, as common sense does, between reason and emotion.

truth-bearing nature of a story about the world, as idle metaphysical chatter. The truth status of background ontological assumptions is irrelevant. The only question is whether the story by which we live supports the values by which we want to live. Indeed, there is no other measure of truth. There is no deeper ground to vision, story, or values than our wanting them to be so and our living by them. Rorty urges us to seize hope in the place of and without regard to purported knowledge, that is, to be hopeful without claiming grounds for our hope.⁹

I do not want to dismiss this view out of hand. None the less, I do not want to agree with it. I want to claim that there are grounds for hope and that these grounds transcend the narratives that give shape and coherence to hope. These grounds are to be found in the conditions for hope per se. I will claim that hope originates in an emotional response to our situation but is soon able to outstrip the category of emotion. We discover in hope as emotion something deeper; we discover the possibility of virtue and of knowledge. I want to claim that hope is best understood as a virtue, indeed as a civic virtue—a virtue that conduces to our life in common—and that virtue discloses knowledge. In searching for the warrant of hope, I would claim that the act of hope itself gives us an intuition or fundamental apprehension of its ground. Hope has a cognitive dimension or, better, it has its own wisdom. *Hope knows and affirms the value that inheres in being as such.* It anticipates the full amplitude of value against a temporal horizon, a near or far future. Hope is felt as knowledge, that is, as an affirmation of something other than will, than mere desire or wishfulness. That knowledge, in which hope senses it participates, is the knowledge of value. Value claims us, I want to argue, from the very dawn of our awareness of being. Value does not denote our evaluative choices alone; it denotes what chooses us.¹⁰ Thus, the ontology of hope is one where being and value are joined. Where being and value are

⁹ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 24. An excellent discussion of Rorty's hope in America as a 'dream country' and its broader implications for politics may be found in Robert B. Westbrook, *Democratic Hope: Pragmatism and the Politics of Truth* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 139–74.

¹⁰ For a broadly Platonic approach to this line of thought, see Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge, 2001) and Lenn Goodman, *God of Abraham* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). A more pragmatic expression can be found in several works by Hilary Putnam, among them *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life: Rosenzweig, Buber, Levinas, Wittgenstein* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2008), 6. Putnam writes: 'And, like the classic pragmatists, I do not see reality as morally

divided, as in modern philosophy's fact–value distinction, hope floats away from a ground in the knowledge of being and remains mere emotion.

To understand hope properly is to overcome the fact–value dichotomy.¹¹ Were we to do so, we could overcome accounts of value which rest on nothing but convention, leaps of faith, mere preference or foundationless resolve. If hope rests on nothing but sheer will then it can be no more than a risky wager against the encroachment of despair. But if there are reasons for hope which grow out of an affirmation of value intuited in being as such, then hope expresses wisdom, not just defiance. It would be the case that hope and despair are not equally warranted. Hope is ultimately warranted and despair is not, based on our intuition of value, which grows into rationally defensible knowledge. A defence of these claims would amount, I think, to a philosophical reconstruction of biblical hope. Although I cannot promise such a reconstruction and defence of biblical hope here, my intention is to argue, through a critical study of relevant ancient, medieval, and modern texts, in this direction.

Many who want to hope, however, will not want to hope within the framework of a biblical faith. To what extent is hope warranted outside the framework of a faith-informed outlook? For four or five centuries now Western humanity has endeavoured to ground hope on bases other than faith in God. To an extent, this is suggested by the experience of hope as such. For hope is a worldly orientation; it is most at home in the anticipation of intelligible goods, of the goods of this world. Even within its mundane setting, however, hope naturally points towards a transcendent horizon. When we hope, we anticipate transformation and emancipation. We hope to be liberated from the constraints or evils that beset us in the present. We imagine a future that resolves the dilemmas of the here and now. If the constraints, evils, and dilemmas run deeply enough, the future we imagine may be radically unlike the present that we wish to transcend. Such a hope gives rise to eschatology, whether of a religious or a secular variety.

indifferent: reality, as Dewey saw, *makes demands* on us. Values may be created by human beings and human cultures, but I see them as made in response to demands that we do not create. It is reality that determines whether our responses are adequate or inadequate.'

¹¹ For a sustained assault on the distinction, see Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

In modernity, the worldliness of hope predominates to a striking degree. The transformation of this world became the principal locus of hope. Otherworldly anticipation, whether of an afterlife or of the spiritual transformation of this life, while never eclipsed, was degraded for much of modern humanity or at least for its intellectuals. An uncritical this-worldliness was 'substituted for the untenable other-worldliness of medievalism'.¹² The traditional loci of hope were relegated to the private sphere, to the personal and marginal. Social change not inner conversion became the proper object of hope. The state was invested with near redemptive significance as the agent of social change. Judaism and Christianity, guarantors of traditional understandings of hope, became enthusiastic participants in the modern project. Religion, redescribed by the Enlightenment, came increasingly to be understood as an encoded social ethics, as a means of ameliorating society in the direction of liberal and democratic values. Hope entered a democratic age.

The story of the transformation of hope, of the investment of hope in perennial struggles for social change, and of the frequent experience of disillusionment with that investment, is one of the stories of modern politics. Of course, given the duality of hope as both worldly and transcendent, politics and hope have always been inextricably linked. None the less, ancient religious systems, such as Judaism and Christianity, had mechanisms for constraining overly enthusiastic hopes for political life. Judaism deferred the achievement of a truly just society to a messianic age; Christianity both gave the City of Man a proper goal and ranked that goal below the City of God. With the weakening of Christendom in the west, those mechanisms lost their power. Similarly, with the entrance of Jews into modern societies traditional Jewish apprehensions of the limits of politics lost their hold. At the basis of modern politics lies a displacement of traditional Jewish and especially of Christian hope. Modern politics, first anticipated by Marsilius of Padua and then articulated in its fundamental features by Machiavelli and Hobbes, posits the body

¹² Reinhold Niebuhr, 'Optimism, Pessimism, and Religious Faith', in Robert McAfee Brown, *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986), 8. The quote continues 'and men become confused by a superficial optimism in the very moment when they celebrate their emancipation from a morbid pessimism'.

politic as a purely immanent domain. It lacks, indeed, it tends to reject, a transcendent dimension.¹³ Modern politics was not supposed to ennoble the soul, like Platonic politics, or allow humans to pursue virtue together as in Aristotle's politics. Modern politics prepares us neither for classical virtue nor for heaven. Its principal aim is the restraint of evil and the securing of order. In its pure form, it does not hope to make us better or to impede us, as private persons, from becoming worse. If this were all there were to it, however, modern politics would not differ in kind from Augustine's understanding of the proper, quite limited purposes of the City of Man. Augustine, after all, rejected the pretensions of both Platonic and Aristotelian politics. Modern politics, however, goes further. A disillusioned reading suggests that it seeks to restrain evil by cooptation. It secures order by facilitating conditions under which large numbers of citizens can preserve or acquire worldly goods, such as safety, health, property, and wealth. In doing so, it not only seeks to secure Augustine's 'tranquility of order', it seeks to convince us that these goods are sufficient for our welfare, that the political horizon is the last horizon. It signifies the outer limit of what we may hope for. And hope, being well nigh ineradicable, focuses on politics, on coordinated social action, as the solution for every human dilemma.

One sees this especially in the alignment of modern politics with modern science, one chief purpose of which is to relieve the estate of man, as Francis Bacon famously put it. In the cooperation of the modern state, whether liberal, communist, or fascist, with the scientific and technological project of improving the length and quality of life, traditional biblical hope was transformed into modern secular hope and reinvested in modern social experiments. In early modernity, the hope of changing history, institutions, and persons proliferated to a much greater extent than the ancients or the medievals thought possible. The early modern political thinkers, still under the imprint of Christian teaching, had their own version of original sin—the pre-moral passion of the state of nature—which lowered the horizon of their hope to political stability alone. But as the new secular hope grew more distant from its original biblical moorings, it lost the Bible's

¹³ Pierre Manent, *The City of Man*, trans. Marc A. LePain (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 183–4. See also Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God* (New York: Basic Books, 2007).

realism about the checkered nature of humanity, what Kant, still under the impress of his Pietist upbringing, called the 'crooked timber' of the human. The peaceful denizens of Bacon's technological Utopia, Bensalem, although nominally Christian, are as flawed as their descendants in Huxley's technological dystopia *Brave New World*. Unlike Bacon, Huxley, at the end of this process, was better able to see where it might lead. In the twentieth century, unrestrained secular hope mutated into utopian–dystopian visions of radical social transformation. Eschatology was to become reality. God's time had to become our time. Liberal politics rightly rejects the extreme transformation of hope into a purely immanent eschatology realized through unrestrained political and technological means. None the less, liberal politics often fails to resist the transformation of hope from which modern politics as a whole draws its vitality.

Modern hope, like other products of secularization, is not entirely alien to the predecessor from which it developed. Christian hope, like modern hope, stakes its claim on the radically new.¹⁴ The idea of progress, while uniquely intensified by modernity, is rooted in the Christian conviction that God has decisively overcome the old in Judaism by the new in Christ. Christ, in the classical account, fulfils but he also brings to an end. Something quite new has entered history and has now changed everything, at least *in nuce*. Judaism is less prone to this kind of thinking. Although the Hebrew Scriptures speak of a new heaven and a new earth (Isa. 65: 17), normative Jewish tradition understood the new in the sense of a renewal or a restoration of the old rather than the inauguration of a wholly new creation. Christianity gave the new enormous power. The impact of the idea of the new was limited, however, by the theology and social order of medieval Christendom. When the medieval order came apart, the Christian idea of the new was ready to be co-opted by a revolutionary doctrine of progress. Without a belief in progress, modern hope and modern politics could not be sustained. The current decline in the belief in progress is correlated with a perceived enfeeblement of social and political hope.¹⁵

¹⁴ On the Christian, particularly the Augustinian, roots of the concept of the new, see Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1963), 20.

¹⁵ It is customary today to differentiate between 'private' and 'social' hope, the latter indicating the prospect of improvement of the world through political action. When commentators lament the loss of social hope they do not thereby imply that people have

Liberal societies, while suspicious of radically utopian uses of politics, are still indebted to the transformations that produced modern utopianism. Secular hope, faith in progress, and belief in the new are the lifeblood of a liberal political order. The restraint on these impulses, such as it is, no doubt comes from the deposit of traditional faith that is still to be found in some liberal societies, particularly in the United States. None the less, the relationship between faith-informed hope and modern democratic hope is a troubled one. The Baconian possibilities for science, represented by cloning or stem cell research, for example, are much greater than Bacon could have imagined. Modern hope again nurtures a vision of life with minimal suffering or disease. Christian and Jewish hope, which accepts suffering to some extent as the necessary concomitant of the human condition, resists some of the new technological possibilities as theologically misguided and ethically pernicious.¹⁶ This resistance is increasingly unintelligible to the proponents of modern hope. The liberal state, as a body politic founded on modern hope, is scarcely able to resolve this fundamental tension.¹⁷

The problem of competing, fundamental orientations in hope is not only a problem of adjudicating the competing claims of different populations. It is not a problem of deciding whose rights trump whose, with the state ideally remaining neutral. Rather, it goes all the way down to the basic legitimacy of the most benign expression of the modern political drive, the liberal democratic state. Can a politics, the origins of which have much to do with satisfying worldly hope, accept the contingency, the non-ultimacy, of its hope? Can a

ceased to hope for strictly personal goods. Rather, they point to the loss of hope in the possibilities afforded by democratic political action. Typically, they seek to reawaken it. For an example of disillusionment and the call to overcome it, see, e.g., Ronald Aronson, 'Hope after Hope?' in Arien Mack (ed.), *Social Research*, 66 (1999), 471–94.

¹⁶ I don't mean to suggest that Christianity and Judaism reject the same possibilities or reject them in the same way. Catholicism, for example, has been unyielding in its opposition to embryonic stem cell research. Judaism, even in its most traditional expressions, has been supportive (although see David Novak, *The Sanctity of Human Life* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2007)). Both, however, would reject reproductive cloning.

¹⁷ I use the words 'liberal' and 'democratic' in this book without worrying too much about the distinctions between them or about the distinctions among the various types of liberalism or of democracy. The words are used broadly to label societies, such as those in the US, UK, and Western Europe, the governments and political cultures of which are described by their fidelity to rights, constitutionalism, limited government, equality under the law, equality of opportunity, citizenship, universal franchise, etc.

liberal political order accept its limits? Can it resist becoming its own religion? This is not just a matter of the liberal polity paying lip service to the religious heritage of many of its citizens through civil religious invocations such as ‘in God we trust’ or of accommodating religious groups and practices in a legal sense. Rather, for its own good, the liberal polity must acknowledge the non-ultimacy of its own form of hope because it cannot, in the nature of things, fully deliver on the hopes that it engenders. The worldly hope that it promises to fulfil more often than not it fails to fulfil. It needs to keep traditional understandings of hope alive among its citizens as a counterweight to its own inflated and unrealistic promises of hope. The liberal state, more than it knows, needs the sobriety about life in the here and now that biblical hope induces. Were it not for a spiritual realism in many of its citizens about this world, the liberal state would lose legitimacy in proportion to its failure to solve the problems that it sets for itself. Indeed, to the extent to which the biblical religions have been more or less thoroughly transformed by modernity and the liberal state, they have lost their resistance to purely secular versions of hope. Their older forms of hope appear fantastic or misguided to their adherents. (I refer here less to the hope for heaven or a world to come—these hopes remain quite widespread—but to hopes that entail limits on human progress, knowledge or freedom; to hopes that are constrained by limits derived from core religious convictions about human dignity, as well as about the inevitability of human suffering.) The religions have reduced themselves to helpmeets to the secular processes of social transformation. This is neither good for them nor good for the liberal state, which, properly speaking, needs their alternative vision of hope. It is in the interest of the liberal order to conserve the older, less this-worldly understandings of human purpose and aspiration, and the traditions and practices that sustain them, as much as it is in the interest of biblical religion itself.

In this sense, hope is a civic virtue in a democratic age. Hope, I shall argue, can rise from an emotion to a virtue to the degree that it requires cultivation and discernment. As a virtue, it is subject to strong evaluation, such as praise, in a way that emotion is not. Hope is thought, given a society that tells a certain kind of story, to be meritorious. That is true of all virtues, civic or otherwise. Hope is a civic virtue, however, in so far as it helps to promote civic association, cooperation, initiative, and effort on behalf of the common good. It is

politically prophylactic, as outlined above, as well as positively necessary for social trust and political action. If citizens did not invest some measure of hope into their common institutions and initiatives, liberal society would lose its reason for being and collapse. To warn against a modernist over-investment of hope in politics is not to counsel despair towards politics. It is to counsel discernment, prudence, and sobriety. There is no liberal politics without hope, and liberal politics, flawed though it is, is the best system yet devised for honouring such constitutive values as justice, freedom, autonomy, political participation, and equality of worth and opportunity.¹⁸ The ability of liberal, democratic states to secure these goods alleviates somewhat a purely disenchanting reading of modern politics. Although not its primary intention, liberal politics also offers possibilities for the ‘growth of the soul’.¹⁹

To argue that hope is a virtue—an ancient and medieval argument largely silent today outside of the homiletics of traditional religious communities—is to commit oneself to a host of implications. To say that something, say courage, is a virtue, is to believe that courage both conduces to the end of human excellence and that it is excellent in itself. It has both instrumental and intrinsic worth. Institutions and practices that train persons to be courageous and that support and nurture courage within them are required in order to keep courage alive. The experience of courage is both good in itself and good for the ends it serves. Virtues then are tied to social institutions and practices, and also display a polarity of both instrumental and intrinsic value.²⁰

¹⁸ One can protest in the manner of Jacques Ellul that redescribing what Christians understand to be a theological virtue (hope) as a ‘civic virtue’ is an instance of the modern deformity of politicization. Everything is sucked into the sphere of politics, given worth only by its presumptive relevance to politics, etc. From Ellul’s point of view, rethinking hope as a civic virtue debases rather than ennoble it. Is responsibility for this world, exercised through politics, then base? That seems deeply mistaken. See Ellul, *The Political Illusion*, trans. Konrad Kellen (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 16.

¹⁹ Books such as David Walsh, *The Growth of the Liberal Soul* (Columbia, Miss.: University of Missouri Press, 1997) and Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992) explore the deepest values, the ‘spiritual’ dimension, of liberal society in such a way as to relate the liberal order to the highest things. So, too, political theorists such as William Galston, Steven Macedo, Peter Berkowitz, and others have tried to evoke the virtues inherent in characters shaped by a liberal order. Such academic liberals respond to the spiritual deficit charged against liberalism by communitarian thinkers such as MacIntyre and Michael Sandel. On a broad construal of the liberal democratic order, all of these positions fall within the range of the liberal tradition and collectively represent an impulse to seek its highest integration and meaning.

²⁰ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 181ff.

The same is true of hope. Hope is not always an instrument towards an end, that is, an anticipation of a better future that orients or motivates us to work towards that telos. Hope is also an excellence experienced within the present moment. It is, as suggested above, a kind of wisdom or knowledge about the value of being revealed *hic et nunc*. Thus, hope is not always about change. *It is also about conserving the practices and institutions that support meaning, which have been inherited from the past and still endure in the present.* Hope can be about the defence of meaning in the face of change. We often hope for the endurance of the present or, more precisely, for the endurance of certain features of the past and the present into the future. Hope is not only the anticipation of change and liberation. It is also the desire for those life-giving and meaning-sustaining forces that we value to persist, even to prevail. In this sense, hope is emancipatory *and* conservative, progressive and traditional.²¹ In the modern account of hope, however, the emancipatory and progressive dimension became predominant. The reality of hope as the desire for the conservation of value has been eclipsed. Part of the burden of this book will be to argue on behalf of this counter-intuitive, present-oriented focus of hope. I believe that this characterization is inherent in the concept of virtue. As we extend virtue into civic virtue, the political consequences of hope as a conservative force within a liberal society will become more apparent.

A liberal society needs both emancipatory and conserving hope. Injustices must be recognized, criticized, and addressed, and traditions that sustain and ennoble life must be named, protected, and sustained. The polarity is ineluctable. The latter is a much harder sell in a liberal society. Conserving hope, as opposed to transforming and emancipating hope, entails identifying and protecting those institutions that allow people to flourish (indeed, let us not shrink from saying), to live holy lives. While the hope for liberation can set freedom against every status quo, the project of conserving hope asks us to identify

²¹ Although it is hardly possible, I would like in this way to weaken the stalemate between conservatives and progressives. It is a perennial reflex of American culture to oscillate between nostalgia for an imagined virtuous past and longing for a luminous, as yet unachieved, future. Progressives denigrate the past as mythic and marked by unacknowledged crimes and sins. Conservatives scorn the vacuous dreams of the future. To be true to the experience of hope, one ought to give both past and future their due. See Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and its Critics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), esp. ch. 3.

those traditions and institutions that nurture the best in human beings and give us the best possibility for a virtuous common life. It asks us to protect them against the levelling dynamics of our present politics and culture. Hope can also be found in the active safeguarding of traditions and not only, as we are misled to believe, in the abandonment and escape from traditional norms and ways of life. The best politics would be one where the pure liberal goals of freedom and autonomy are strengthened in tandem with the older, republican values of community, solidarity, and civic tradition.²² Whether such a politics is conceivable, let alone achievable, is an open question. If so, it would constitute a worthy locus for our political hopes for this world.

All of these issues are implicated in an exploration of the phenomenon of hope. This book explores these issues in a fundamental way. The first chapter begins to analyse hope by posing the basic question: what is hope? How shall we categorize it? Is hope best understood as an emotion or passion, a disposition, a type of belief, or, most expansively, a virtue? Although each categorization has its strengths and weaknesses, I argue, as is already evident, that hope as a virtue has much to commend it, even for those who do not accept the full background of religious assumptions out of which this characterization emerged. In early modern thought, hope was counted among the emotions or passions and largely divorced from reason. Considering hope as a virtue does justice to both its emotional and cognitive dimensions as well as to the web of institutions, practices, norms, and relationships in which hopeful persons live and without which hope is senseless.

The idea that hope is a virtue is found in the Bible. It is incipient in the Psalms as well as in other texts from the Hebrew Scriptures, although, to be sure, the Hellenic language of virtue (*arête*) is absent. Hope qua virtue becomes explicit in the New Testament, especially in the Pauline letters. The case for hope as a virtue was argued by Thomas Aquinas and by the medieval Jewish philosopher Joseph Albo. The second chapter explores Aquinas and Albo's teachings about hope. In Aquinas's case, he initially counts hope among the passions, treating it, in his Aristotelian way, as a natural response of the pre-rational soul to pleasurable or desirable future objects. But Aquinas also develops a

²² A sustained argument on behalf of such a 'republican liberalism' may be found in Richard Dagger, *Civic Virtues: Rights, Citizenship and Republican Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

different account of hope: hope as a virtue that links us, in virtuous perfection, to the divine. To move from passion to virtue is to rise, for Aquinas, both in reason and in grace. Aquinas's account describes a complex interrelation between passion and reason, on the one hand, and an interrelation of human action and divine action, on the other. It is both rational and virtuous to hope, as it is to have faith and charity. Albo's thesis is remarkably similar, although articulated within a Jewish idiom. But what happens if we dispense with these theological assumptions? If we strip away some of the metaphysics and shed some of the specifically Jewish or Christian views, does the virtue account of hope collapse back into an emotive or passionate one? I argue that, even outside of the medieval world of religious beliefs, this analysis of hope speaks to us in our own more secular context and that, furthermore, it is well worth trying to reconstruct that account in a modern moral and political idiom. If we want to sustain a liberal polity, we need to cultivate hope as a virtue, indeed, as a civic virtue.

To consider hope as a virtue is a response, in part, to philosophical traditions that portray hope as something less; as either a mere emotion or even as a vice. Speaking personally, I came to the view that hope is a virtue not out of any devotion to Paul or Aquinas but out of a sense that early modern philosophy offered far too paltry an analysis of hope. I felt as a Jew that hope strongly characterized my own response to life and I sought, in vain, for an adequate account of it in the philosophical tradition. The more I explored the philosophical tradition, the more ambivalence towards hope I discovered. It seemed to me that hope is in some measure a choice, a stand taken against despair, but such a view was hardly compatible with the assumption that hope was merely an emotion. None the less, I wanted to interrogate my own bias towards hope. What if it is merely a prejudice, an artifact of growing up in a certain kind of religiously inflected culture? Thus, in the third chapter, I explore the ambivalence towards, indeed, at times the animus against hope in classical and Hellenistic culture. I look at the status of hope in Attic poetry and tragedy and then at the philosophical traditions of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. The philosophers do not have a great deal to say about hope but what little they say is fascinating and often disparaging. There is a huge gulf between the biblical valorization of hope and the Greco-Roman ambivalence towards and, at times, outright denigration of it. Were this book a kind of apology for biblical faith, it might suffice to dismiss

these discordant notes. But that would be to cheat ourselves of potential sources of wisdom. I believe that we need to take the philosophical critique of hope seriously and not take whatever Jewish and Christian orientations towards hope—or their secularized translations—for granted. We must become aware of these orientations and see how they stand up to a ‘pagan’ or neo-pagan analysis and critique. Stoicism is, as Alasdair MacIntyre points out, not simply an ancient philosophical movement but a permanent possibility of the human spirit.²³

After considering the ancients, I turn to several moderns. In Spinoza, we find an emotion-oriented treatment of hope, which empties hope of significance and reintroduces a Stoic-like resignation as the *summum bonum*. Such modern thinkers as Descartes, Spinoza, Hobbes, Locke, and Hume define hope as an emotion and reduce emotions to mechanistic or ‘hydraulic’ phenomena. Although these early attempts at a modern scientific presentation of the emotions have been largely superseded by more nuanced accounts, they have left a legacy. Many moderns continue to think of hope as an emotional attitude towards the world and, as such, its cognitive status, let alone its virtuous aspect, is questionable. To ask whether a particular act of hope is reasonable or not seems beside the point. In a virtue account of hope, the relation of hope to practical reason, for example, to prudence, makes sense. In the work of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche philosophy overcame the etiolated treatment of emotions and rediscovered the significance of hope—and then attacked it roundly. These nineteenth-century pessimists saw hope as much more than an errant emotion. They saw it as a dangerous illusion, dangerous both to knowledge of the truth and to well-being. Both proposed ways of life that are beyond hope; indeed, that celebrate fate and affirm tragedy as the last word.

This kind of philosophical critique of hope raises the stakes. If we are to hope and to hope rightly, we ought to be aware of the risks of doing so. How might we fend off the criticisms of a Stoic, or of Spinoza, Schopenhauer, or Nietzsche? For one thing, we will find immediately that we need other virtues, such as courage, in order to hope. (If, indeed, hope is a virtue it is no accident that other virtues are related to its exercise. The teaching of the unity or, at least, the interrelatedness of the virtues has been an active trope since Plato.) But we need more than courage. We need good reasons. We need

²³ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 169.

warrants. To hope is to become vulnerable to disappointment, to dependency, to delusion. Hope, as it refuses to acquiesce in finality or fate, involves risk. It refuses the offer of resignation to current reality with its attendant certainty. To defend hope is to explore the nexus of certainty and risk, fate and resistance, epistemology and ethics. It is to raise the question of the warrants for hope. Biblical hope, if it were to take a philosophical critique seriously, must show why its ground is at least as rational as that of the philosophical opponents of hope.

In the fourth chapter, I turn to the other source of the Western tradition, the biblical, Jewish, and Christian stream. Jewish hope, articulated in the Torah, prophets, and writings, and refracted through the rabbinic literature, is a complex and variegated affair. It has to do with the redemption of the People Israel, as well as of the entire creation. It has also to do with individual hope for desired objects such as well-being, prosperity, victory, peace, and progeny. And it has to do with a fundamental resolution of the problem of being, above all, for closeness to God, for being in God's presence. The biblical relationship between object-oriented hope and fundamental hope, that is, hope as the knowledge and affirmation of the value of being requires analysis. Furthermore, biblical and Jewish hope has to do both with what I have called conserving hope—the promotion or restoration of life-giving traditions, institutions, and states of affairs, which in turn is based on the affirmation of value at the present moment—as well as with emancipatory hope. The last involves an eschatological dimension. To what extent is biblical and Jewish hope about the radically new, the revolutionary transformation of reality? To what extent is it social, corporate, comprehensive? To what extent is it private, personal, otherworldly? Does biblical and Jewish hope have an implied answer to the Greco-Roman philosophical challenge? Are there fundamental differences between Jewish appropriations of biblical hope and Christian ones? I analyse the shape of early Christian hope, the balance between conservation and emancipation, endurance and transformation, private and public, mundane and extra-mundane, and contrast this with Jewish formulations. Despite the differences, however, I am persuaded that the underlying structure—the structure of hope as a virtue—is the same for both traditions. As a result, Jews and Christians can stand shoulder to shoulder in liberal society as advocates and practitioners of rational, virtuous hope, as well as critics of misplaced and overblown hope.

In the fifth chapter, I consider the modern displacement and transformation of religious hope and the emergence of secular hope. I look at two representative figures from the eighteenth-century French and German Enlightenments, reflecting first on Condorcet's and then on Kant's discussions. Hope, in this context, is tied to faith in progress; to the belief that history exemplifies moral advance. Unlike the modern philosophers considered in Chapter 3, Condorcet and Kant are advocates, not critics of hope. They continue the positive value-laden emphases of the biblical literatures and of the medievals. They secularize Providence and transform it into Progress. One sees as well another profound transformation that modernity has worked on hope. For Aquinas, hope is a divine gift that allows us, through virtue, to commune with and imitate God. In the Bible, it is our duty to respond in hope to God's promises. In Kant, hope changes from a duty we owe God (Why *must* I hope?) to a right one is permitted by reason to exercise (What *may* I hope for?). Yet, unlike the earlier modern thinkers, Kant does not divorce hope qua emotion from reason. Hope is a rational orientation that supports moral conduct and is warranted by, according to Kant, the study of human history. Lest we be prone to separate the Enlightenment and traditional faith into separate camps—as Condorcet certainly did—Kant keeps us honest by showing how interwoven the secular project and its religious presuppositions are.²⁴

But how did this Enlightenment embrace of progress hold up against nineteenth-century pessimists such as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, not to mention the extreme dislocations of the two world wars of the twentieth century? I turn next to one of the leading works on hope in the Western tradition, Ernst Bloch's *The Principle of Hope* (*Das Prinzip Hoffnung*). Bloch's work is a vast if eccentric synthesis, which has much to teach about the 'hopeful consciousness', about the epistemological status of hope, and about the connections between secularized hope and realized eschatology. Like Condorcet (but unlike Kant), Bloch is radically secular. Bloch, as a highly unorthodox but none the less committed Marxist thinker, exemplifies the modern, profane, post-biblical hope in all of its grandeur and, I want to say, failure. An unapologetic utopian, Bloch urges, as the title

²⁴ The fundamental religiosity of Kant is taken as a telling criticism against him by Raymond Geuss in 'Liberalism and its Discontents', *Outside Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 20.

of a dissertation on his philosophy puts it, 'ultimate hope without God'.²⁵ Through a critical study of Bloch, we discern the deep conjunction of modern hope and modern politics. In so far as Bloch's politics is socialist, if not communist, one must pay careful attention to where the liberal tradition departs from Bloch's vision. None the less, as a modern politics, the liberal order is no stranger to Blochian, purely emancipatory hope. As a rejoinder to Bloch, I consider finally Hannah Arendt's concept of natality, of the role of the new as a harbinger of hope in politics. All of these thinkers, some more vigorously than others, gesture towards the self-sufficiency of hope without God. How Jews and Christians have responded to the attempted secularization of hope is the subject of Chapter 6.

After examining the principles of secular hope, I return in Chapter 6 to a consideration of how the biblical religions, Christianity and Judaism, both resisted and were co-opted by modern hope. The emphasis here is on how Jewish and Christian thinkers conceptualized the relationship between hope and politics. There are three ideal-typical possibilities for framing this relation. Politics in the broadest sense as organized human action on a large scale can either be a sufficient vehicle for the fulfilment of hope, a failure vis-à-vis human hope, or a necessary but insufficient engagement on behalf of human hope. Among Jewish thinkers, I consider Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, and Martin Buber. Cohen had a robust faith in political action in the service of messianic hope. (He was, *mutatis mutandis*, a mentor of Bloch's.) Rosenzweig fully repudiated politics and disengaged ultimate hope from it altogether. Buber maps out, in tension with some deep utopian tendencies, a realistic, non-messianic, chastened view of politics.

Among Christian thinkers, I look first at Walter Rauschenbusch, an American of German descent who was a contemporary of Cohen. A leading advocate for the Social Gospel movement during the Progressive era of American history, Rauschenbusch thought that the deliberate social and political action of Christians could bring about the Kingdom of God in America. Diametrically opposed to Rauschenbusch is the American theologian Stanley Hauerwas. Hauerwas represents something of a Christian parallel to Rosenzweig. A pacifist

²⁵ See Thomas H. West, *Ultimate Hope Without God: The Atheistic Eschatology of Ernst Bloch* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991).

influenced by the Mennonite tradition, Hauerwas would disengage the Church from liberal politics and cultivate a virtuous, inward-looking holy community as the last repository for hope in this world. I then consider the Bloch-influenced Protestant thinker Jürgen Moltmann. Moltmann's *The Theology of Hope* initiated a new wave of Christian engagement with the theme of politics and hope. Although this theme ran its course in mainstream Protestant theology rather quickly, it influenced Latin American liberation theology, which is still somewhat of a going concern. Here the tie between politics and hope is at its strongest—although the argument for the tie may be, in the last analysis, quite weak. Moltmann, like Buber, would invest politics with hope while simultaneously restraining Christians from investing too greatly. Finally, I consider the normative Catholic position, as outlined in the Second Vatican Council text *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. In seeking to pair Jewish and Christian thinkers according to ideal types, I try to make the statement that, while modern Jewish and Christian religious thought contributes different resources to the civic project, both can form a common front on behalf of the renewal of a public philosophy and a shared story for a liberal society.

In the Conclusion, I reflect on the potential role that the Jewish and Christian constructions of biblical hope could play in the liberal societies, particularly in the United States. Modern liberal politics is very much a politics of hope. It seeks to secure the support and consent of the governed not, as at the Founding, through the prospect of self-government, but through the provision of goods and services, entitlements, and expanding rights. The Founders' vision of a politics of republican liberty (albeit in a modern, commercial republic), joined to a biblical realism about human sin, has devolved into a service provision state where expectant clients replace duty-bound citizens. Hopes for worldly goods are raised and frustrated, and the legitimacy of politics is damaged in proportion to its failure to fulfil the hopes it has engendered. Citizens' assumptions of the duties of self-governance are exchanged for presumptive rights to benefits, entitlements, and liberties to pursue the project of selfhood within expansive borders of privacy. What sort of hope is appropriate and necessary to persons living in such a social world? Can a reengagement with the sources of hope renew the prospects for responsible citizenship and life-sustaining civil society? Can hope count not only as a private virtue but as

a civic virtue for democratic citizens? I argue that a chastened, non-eschatological hope, which focuses on conserving meaning-preserving institutions, is most appropriate to democratic civil society.

On the other hand, I do not want to slight emancipatory hope. When Lincoln called liberty 'the last best hope of earth', he did not have in mind the preservation of the past. He wanted to underscore what persons and nations could make of themselves in liberty in the future. As a virtue, hope emphasizes agency, typically human agency. Accordingly, a politics that enhances human agency, that encourages cooperative action, creative problem solving, attention to a common good, and republican participation is also a fit object for hope. Some of the most successful governmental programs or legislation, such as the GI bill and the Voting Rights Act, were precisely those that enhanced agency and participation. We can evaluate policies and laws that claim to bring hope, in the emancipatory sense, by how well they nurture mature human agency and discourage dependency, subordination, and apathy towards responsible citizenship.

Hope is nourished by well-functioning civil and political institutions, just laws, equitable access to economic opportunity, all of which rest on a moral basis informed by sober assessment of the human prospect. Sobriety is tinged by tragedy. It resists enthusiasm for radical change because it holds that tragedy cannot in the end be extirpated from human affairs. It can sometimes be deferred. There is, for Jews and Christians, a hope that overcomes tragedy but it is not, properly speaking, a hope that ends in politics. It is a hope that runs through politics. It is a hope about the order of ultimacy within which politics is a subsidiary although highly significant sphere. Short of that great fulfilment of hope, for which Jews and Christians in their separate but related ways pray, there are tasks of emancipation and preservation. There is much to repair and restore, as well as to conserve and protect. This book aspires to remind its readers of how traditional modes of life and thought contribute, albeit not without tension and paradox, to a modern, liberal politics.

Since this is a rather unusual undertaking, I owe the reader a word about my stance as an author. Over the several years in which this project has taken shape, I have been asked repeatedly by friends and colleagues whether I have been writing a 'Jewish book'. I have not been certain what to answer. I have said that at its roots this book, which comes out of deep conviction, is a Jewish book. But it is not a Jewish

book on the surface.²⁶ I have tried to adopt (not always successfully) a neutral scholarly tone as between Judaism and Christianity and an engaged, positive tone as between Judaism and Christianity, and secularism. None the less, I have always tried to give 'secularism', going back to the unhopeful Greeks, its due. I hope that scholarly caution, nuance, and qualification do not stand in the way of the strong evaluation and conviction for which I also argue. As a scholar, I aspire to a 'view from nowhere' in certain of my pursuits. But no one *lives* in nowhere-land and this is, finally, a book about how to live. I hope that the voice of a committed Jew sounds here for all to hear. But one can also hear the voice of an American citizen who is struggling to find a common basis among at least some of the historic traditions that fuel the American experiment so as to revivify and carry that experiment forward into a new century.

²⁶ That Christian theology gets equal time with Jewish thought in this book was not my original intention. None the less, as I began to explore the material it became clear to me that the intellectual problematic of hope has been developed in a more robust way in Christianity—owing to Paul's characterization of hope as a virtue—than in Judaism. This became for me both a problem and an opportunity. Once I committed myself to 'equal time' I suspended, to an extent, my ability to write as a Jew. I have tried to balance neutrality and commitment, scholarship and engagement throughout this work. Whether I have succeeded in keeping these axiological lines straight or only tangling them the reader will have to judge.

I

The Character of Hope

One can imagine an animal angry, frightened, unhappy, happy, startled. But hopeful? And why not?

Wittgenstein

Hope appears to be something utterly fundamental to our humanity. Is it possible to live without it? Even when philosophers have cautioned against it and tried to discourage persons from having it, they cannot quite escape it. Do they not, by discouraging hope, propound a hope of their own—namely, the possibility of living a certain sort of life, one that is indifferent to pleasure and pain, joy or despair; one that promises perhaps liberation, quietude, or certainty? Hope appears to be constitutive of who we are, of any schema for living in and coming to terms with our humanity. But what is hope? How shall we categorize it? In this chapter, I consider some typical rubrics under which philosophers have analysed the various aspects of hope. None of these should be understood as mutually exclusive. Hope, even if we consider it in purely formal terms, devoid of any content, is a variegated and complex phenomenon.

How fundamental is hope? Is it so fundamental as to express what Aristotle would call the ‘nutritive’ and ‘sensitive’—that is, the most organic dimensions of our nature? Is hope akin to hunger or thirst? As a Latin proverb puts it, *dum spiro, spero*: as long as I breathe, I hope. Is it as fundamental as breathing? If this were so then we would expect animals to feel hope but it is hard to know whether that is the case. As we shall see, Thomas Aquinas does defend the view that animals are motivated by hope. As we come to know more about the neurobiology of emotion in humans and (other) animals perhaps we will be able

to sustain this claim. But, there is another problem here which is more a logical than an empirical one. If hope were akin to breathing, hunger, or thirst it would not be subject to a complex interplay between feeling and belief, emotion and judgement. Hopes can be raised or depressed by speech, evidence, discourse. Hunger and thirst typically are not, although some stimuli, such as television advertisements for food or drink, can induce the relevant feelings. None the less, hope involves cognitive dimensions for which a purely or crudely organic view cannot account. Hope is fundamental to us but it is fundamental to our uniquely human nature, not to those dimensions of nature that we share with other creatures. Of course, those shared dimensions *are* part of our human nature—consider that almost 99 per cent of the DNA in a human being is identical to that in a chimpanzee.¹ These shared dimensions do not account, however, for what we believe—wrongly, from a strictly materialist point of view—to be distinctive about the human. As the citation from Wittgenstein with which this chapter began indicates, it is odd to attribute hope to animals. Why? Because animals cannot imagine a future—that is something for which one requires language; for which one must be human.

A contemporary refinement of this position understands hope from an evolutionary perspective as a mechanism conducive to adaptation and fitness, in a Darwinian sense. We are ‘hardwired’ for hope, as we are for other—for lack of a better word—emotions.² Hope is a product of our hominid prehistory, of natural selection.³ It confers adaptive survival benefits on the creatures capable of it. In particular, hope, as an expectation about the outcome of a survival challenge, can strengthen the effort towards survival, towards realizing an adaptive goal. Hope can make a difference in the outcome of a task essential for survival, whether completing the hunt or overcoming breast cancer. Hope can override reason and prudence, which might inhibit action where action is called for. Jerome Groopman’s moving memoir, *The Anatomy of Hope*, attests to this. Groopman, an oncologist, traces the role that

¹ Matt Ridley, *The Agile Gene* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 24.

² Randolph M. Nesse, ‘The Evolution of Hope and Despair’, *Social Research: An International Quarterly of the Social Sciences*, 66 (1999), 437.

³ In the same issue see also the anthropological study by Lionel Tiger, ‘Hope Springs Internal’. For example: ‘The core conclusion is that at least moderate optimism or hope is necessary to overcome the capacity of the enormous cortex to generate endlessly discouraging predictions of the pitfalls of any action. Hope is cognition’s positive discipline’ (ibid. 617). Hope is an adaptive mechanism that compensates for the potentially deleterious complications of thought in brains originally evolved for action.

hope plays in severe illness—including his own decade plus experience of chronic, debilitating pain. Often, people who were capable of generating hope in the face of their condition had either better survival outcomes or, if the cancer was intractable, better quality of life up to their demise. Hope, considered by Groopman in a neuroscience framework, has to do with raising levels of endorphins and enkephalins, with neural circuitry, with inducing physiological changes that affect health and disease.⁴ Such views are no doubt valuable, as they open up possibilities for scientific research that enable us to discover truths about the human. But they also, to the extent that they treat human beings as beings who are driven by causes rather than reasons, truncate the horizon of the human. As with all scientific determinisms, hard and soft, human freedom, agency, and individual uniqueness, dignity and significance are casualties of materialist reductionism.⁵

Such views assume that hope is an emotion or a passion. They seek to provide an evolutionary biological, psychological, or neuroscientific analysis of emotion. There is, of course, a long history of philosophical writing on the emotions. The contemporary scientific accounts have at least one thing in common with many of the philosophical ones: they treat emotion as something that happens to us rather than something in which our agency has a hand. (Hence the term ‘passion’: we experience emotion passively rather than produce it as active agents.)

Is emotion then something which happens to us; something that comes and goes in response to inner or outer stimuli in a largely involuntary manner?⁶ (Is hope something over which we have little or no control, an emotion prescribed by our genome and evoked by

⁴ Jerome Groopman, *The Anatomy of Hope: How People Prevail in the Face of Illness* (New York: Random House, 2004). Unresolved in Groopman’s otherwise quite illuminating book is the tension between his first-person, humanistic analysis of hope and the reductive, biological analysis of the last two chapters.

⁵ For a quite triumphalistic praise of reductionism, see Tiger, ‘Hope Springs Internal’, 619. For a philosophical attack on such brusque dismissals of subjectivity, see Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 64. How to order scientific claims about causal processes with religious, theological, or, broadly, humanistic claims is, it goes without saying, one of the great intellectual enterprises of the modern world. Without entering into any detail here, let it suffice to mention the work of Haught as a worthy contribution to the project. See John F. Haught, *Is Nature Enough? Meaning and Truth in the Age of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁶ In these remarks, I follow along Aristotelian lines in seeing emotion as predominantly pre-rational, disregarding for the time being contemporary philosophical constructions of emotion. Contemporary philosophers build into emotion a complex balance of belief, evaluation, and feeling—cognitive and conative elements—largely absent in Aristotle.

the uncontrollable conditions of life?) One view, that of William James and ordinary language, equates emotion with *feeling*. The quickening of the pulse, the flushing of the face, the tightening of the fists that we might feel when we feel anger are not coincident to the anger; they *are* the anger in this account. Emotion as feeling depresses human agency to the greatest extent possible. The opposite view is that emotion is dependent on belief, evaluation, judgement, or conviction as well as on value-laden ties to persons, practices, or institutions in the world, as contemporary philosophers of mind are wont to argue. Philosophers have often oscillated between these positions. The Stoics, for example, treated emotion as highly cognitive and intentional. The richness and complexity of ancient accounts of the passions, however, were greatly simplified and mechanized by early modern philosophy, to the detriment both of philosophy and of our understanding of the emotions.⁷ Descartes and Hobbes for example, treat emotion ‘hydraulically’, as primarily irrational and mechanical.⁸ Hobbes sees human beings as driven by primordial passions—appetite and aversion—the strongest of which is fear, especially the fear of sudden and violent death. He defines hope succinctly as ‘appetite with an opinion of attaining’, that is, appetite that stands a chance of being satisfied by the acquisition of a sought after object.⁹ Hope, therefore, is a surge of appetite directed

(Although, as we shall see, cognitive elements are present in Stoic analyses of emotion.) The early modern philosophers under consideration here also depress the cognitive aspects of emotionality, although in the case of hope they cannot eliminate them altogether. For a distillation and application of the contemporary literature, see Robert Nozick, *The Examined Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 87–98.

⁷ The rejection of Aristotelianism by the New Philosophy of the seventeenth century was based on a desire to overcome the division of the soul in Aristotle and provide a simplified and more materialistic account of the action of the soul and of its interaction with the body. For an analysis of the post-Aristotelianism of Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, and others, see Susan James, *Passion and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth-century Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), esp. ch. 4.

⁸ For a strong critique of the ‘hydraulic’ conception of emotion, which includes not only early modern philosophical treatments but later thinkers and movements as diverse as James, Freud, and behaviourism, see Robert C. Solomon, *The Passions: Emotions and the Meaning of Life* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishing, 1993), 77 ff.

⁹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pt I, ch. VI, sect. 14. See also Descartes, ‘The Passions of the Soul’, pt II, art. LVIII: ‘It suffices to reflect that the acquisition of a good or removal of an evil is possible in order to be incited to desire it. But when besides that we consider whether there is much or little prospect that we shall obtain what we desire, that which represents to us that there is much probability of this excites in us hope, and that which represents to us that there is little, excites fear . . .’ (Elizabeth Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (eds.), *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, i (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931), 359).

towards an object of attainment. In this account, however, hope is not entirely irrational. It involves an 'opinion', that is, a belief in the likelihood of attaining its object. If one were to believe that the object were unattainable, then hope would shift into despair.¹⁰ Despite the primordial and animalistic quality of Hobbes' account of the emotions, a cognitive dimension necessarily enters the picture. None the less, the emphasis is on the non-cognitive dimension.¹¹

With somewhat more refinement, Spinoza also categorizes hope as an emotion; in this case, an emotion awakened by a mental image of something pleasurable from the past, present, or future. In the case of images of things past or imaginations of things to come, the images themselves are inconstant and unstable—flickering, as it were, in the mind's eye. Hence, the pleasure correlated with them is unstable. 'Hope', Spinoza writes, 'is nothing else but an inconstant pleasure, arising from the image of something future or past, whereof we do not yet know the issue'.¹² Emotions are 'confused ideas'. To succumb to them indicates a deficit of mental power. In so far as Spinoza, rehearsing the dominant theme of Stoic ethics, commends the rational transcendence of the passions, he disparages hope as an irrational, refractory force. When we come to know ourselves and the natural order of which we are an expression, we abandon hope and gain truth.

David Hume also understands hope as a passion, produced by uncertainty in the presence of a good or evil impression.¹³ In his rather mechanistic account of moral life, hope and its opposite, fear, arise as unsteady artefacts of joy or grief, which in turn arise out of the presence (or the probability of future) pleasure or pain. Because of our uncertainty as to whether we will continue to experience pleasure or pain, our anticipatory joy mutates into hope or, conversely, our

¹⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pt I, ch. VI, sect. 15. The 'opinion of attaining' is a subjective probability. The most thorough analysis of hope in terms of probability theory is that of J. P. Day, 'Hope: A Philosophical Analysis', *Acta Philosophica Fennica*, 51 (1991), 11–101.

¹¹ Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 95.

¹² Benedict Spinoza, *Ethics*, pt III, prop. XVI. Cf. pt III, Definitions of the Emotions, para. XII. Spinoza's view is similar to John Locke's at *Essay Concerning the Human Understanding*, bk II, ch. 20. See Locke, *An Essay Concerning the Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 231: 'Hope is that pleasure in the Mind, which every one finds in himself, upon the thought of a probable future enjoyment of thing, which is apt to delight him.'

¹³ See Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), bk II, sect. IX, 440–8.

grief mutates into fear. Hope and fear, always twinned, are essentially animal-like responses to pleasurable or painful stimuli under the cloud of ignorance that afflicts human anticipation of the future.

As different as these accounts are, they share the view that hope is best analysed under the category of emotion or, in the older usage, passion—something that happens to us rather than something that we do. Contemporary writers in the philosophy of mind have restored complexity to the analysis of emotion. It is no longer assumed that emotions and feelings are equivalent or that emotions are primarily something that happen to us rather than something that we cause to happen. But, perhaps we should not give up on the feeling analysis of hope or, more precisely, on hope qua emotion and emotion qua feeling too quickly. If we were to adopt the now discredited view that emotions are primarily feelings we would find points of contact with the phenomenon of hope. For, surely hope has some of the characteristics of emotion qua feeling, such as intensity, quasi-autonomy from rational formation or direction, the attribute of accompanying or informing mental actions such as thinking or believing, as well as the quality of being in some way fundamental, of underlying our more conscious and deliberate mental acts. Perhaps hope is equivalent to hopefulness in the sense of optimism. Perhaps it is a sunny disposition that hopeful people bring to their emotional and intellectual lives; that accompanies them as a tone of feeling through all their mental acts. Hope might be a kind of modality or constitutional state of a person's being, which is not chosen or deliberate but given. 'Feeling' may not be the best word to capture this, but I am trying to evoke something spontaneous rather than a product of will or thought. The evolutionary biology and neuroscience analyses of hope similarly root it a deep organic level.

But, these approaches, although they correctly capture something, seem to miss important features of hope as well. We often, for example, treat hope, that is, hopefulness, as a desirable trait of character.¹⁴

¹⁴ Day posits an important distinction between hope and hopefulness, although his reasons for doing so are not clear, nor does the distinction seem more than linguistic to me. The ground of his distinction appears to be that an attitude of hopefulness enhances one's chances of accomplishing what one aims at. In his terms, a higher subjective probability, induced by hopefulness, contributes to a higher objective probability. Although this may hold in some cases, it does not seem to me to suffice to establish a thoroughgoing distinction ('Hope: A Philosophical Analysis', ch. 7).

Hope can be subject to praise or the absence of it subject to blame. If hope were merely an expression of feeling, or even of passion, it would be inappropriate—at least in some traditional accounts, such as Aristotle's—to give it a moral valuation.¹⁵ Arguably, we shouldn't judge someone for feeling something, say fear, at any given moment. Only when fearfulness becomes embodied in a state of character, a habitual response to the world, might we judge someone as having a blameworthy (in this case, cowardly) character. It is the character, the disposition towards virtue or vice, not the brute fact of fear that is praiseworthy or blameworthy. A brave man might, like a coward, feel fear at the sight of an approaching army but what happens next in him and in his actions is the measure of the man. The shaping of his (and of the coward's) character involves a multitude of choices that he has made over time. He may not be responsible for the momentary surge of fear but he *is* responsible, at least within limits, for whether his character is brave or cowardly. This is also true of hope. Although it has emotional, or perhaps, more precisely, feeling-like aspects, hope often involves an element of choice, as when one chooses hope over despair. And such a choice might be praiseworthy, at least in a culture that praises hope. Of course, a sufficiently capacious account of the emotions or passions, such as Aquinas's or those of contemporary philosophers such as Roberts or Solomon, takes these elements into account. It is only the simplistic, precognitive 'hydraulic' view of emotions that does not.¹⁶

¹⁵ Aristotle makes this distinction with respect to virtue and vice, which are manifest in actions that one chooses, and the passions, which arise without choice (*Ethics*, bk II, sect. 6 (1105b28)). This view is not shared by many contemporary philosophers of the emotions who analyse emotion, e.g., as a form of judgement (Solomon) or of 'concern-based construal' (Roberts). For Solomon, emotions are a form of interpretive and evaluative judgement 'about our Selves and our place in the world, the projection of the values and ideals, structures and mythologies, according to which we live and through which we experience our lives'. Emotions are thus akin to and highly dependent upon opinions and beliefs. They are acts we perform rather than events, viz. feelings that happen to us. See Robert C. Solomon, *The Passions: Emotions and the Meaning of Life* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishing, 1993, 125–6). See also Robert C. Roberts, *The Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 64: 'Emotions, like actions, are subject to moral praise and blame.' In both cases, the authors have greatly expanded and nuanced the conventional language sense of 'emotion'. To say then that emotions are subject to praise and blame is possible because of the broadened semantic range of the term.

¹⁶ Evolutionary biological views try to take the evaluative dimension of hope into account through a socio-biology strategy. Nesse, commenting on the social utility of

Hope is not then best explained as a feeling but it might still be explained as an emotion, at least on a more complex, feeling-plus account of what emotions are. Philosophers who treat hope as an emotion or passion tend to pair hope with fear, seeing them as two sides of the same emotional coin. But are they? It is plausible to talk about animals having fear—dogs cower when they are about to be hit. They appear to have some recollection of pain from past events of punishment as well as dread of what is about to occur. But, can we talk of animals hoping? That is unclear. (As mentioned, Aquinas does do this but for reasons more theological than philosophical, as we shall see below.) The habitual pairing of hope and fear in philosophers such as Hobbes, Spinoza, and Hume is cause for concern in so far as their passion theories of hope minimize the possibility that hope can be chosen and that it might be praiseworthy or even virtuous to choose it.¹⁷ Although Hobbes relates hope to belief and Spinoza relates hope to imagination, neither one of these theories succeeds in describing the multilayered complexity of hoping.

Hope may not be adequately interpreted as a distinct emotion, but perhaps it can still be considered as an instance of the more general category of desire. Desire involves will—a voluntary dimension—in a way that sheer emotion, in the reductive sense of feeling, does not. Desire can involve choice and can be subject to praise and blame. We

hope, writes rather darkly that '[T]he powerful people in a society have strong interests in fostering hope and its consequent effort, and in undermining despair and the associated lassitude that threaten any social order. In Western societies, this has long been a major role of the Christian church, which praises hope as one of the three cardinal virtues, and attacks both despair and its proponents. These efforts meet individual needs and simultaneously undermine any attempts to challenge the current hierarchy, thus providing support for the church from a range of levels . . . The conventions are clear—participants in a society are generally required, both by the power structure and each other, to support efforts to find hope and avoid despair'. He continues with his own bit of not quite value-free moralizing: 'By this means, deep illusions are perpetuated, illusions that may, paradoxically, cause unhappiness and the maintenance of inequity' (Nesse, 'The Evolution of Hope and Despair', 430–1). Granted that hopes can be induced by powerful hypocritical or malevolent interests, but does that include the entire Western religious tradition across the centuries? Have the representatives of that tradition had nothing else in mind than the maintenance of their own power? This is hardly an inference to the best understanding.

¹⁷ Writers who, unlike Hobbes, et al., are sensitive to the cultural dimensions of hope do not pair hope with fear but rather with despair or something akin to it. See, e.g., Andrew Delbanco, *The Real American Dream: A Meditation on Hope* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 3–5, who pairs hope with melancholy.

are more circumspect about criticizing the wants or desires of children—beings who have not yet reached the ‘age of reason’—than adults. Desire is the sort of thing over which we have some control and therefore some responsibility.¹⁸ In ancient ethics of various schools, ‘desire, *orexis*, is the most general kind of motivation to do something that we can have. It covers wanting of various kinds, and also covers the motivation generated by reasons, including ethical reasons’.¹⁹ The ancients, unlike moderns such as Hume, did not necessarily oppose desire to reason. They integrated the two and thought, unlike Hume, that reason could direct desire. One might argue then that hope should not be treated as a sufficient or independent phenomenon, a distinct emotion, but rather as a species of the genus ‘desiring’ or ‘wishing’. I can desire to earn enough money to afford a new car. I can wish that I win the lottery. These are trivial even frivolous cases but they can also be expressed without any loss of sense, through a change of verb, as cases of hope. I hope that I will have a good income. I hope that I win the lottery. There is no loss of sense in this substitution but is there a gain in sense? Does hope add anything to desire? Perhaps an added confidence—an attitude of confidence in the future—is expressed by hope. Perhaps hope entails a moment of self-reflection or reflexivity subsequent to the primary act of desiring. That may be the case in certain instances, as when one desires something strongly and is also hopeful about one’s chances of achieving it. But one can also argue that hope is more fundamental than desire; that it serves to orient desire. And just as desires can be either laudable or deplorable, so can the hope that underlies them.

Desire aims at the world, as does hope. Desire, like hope, intends an object to be acquired and retained or a state of affairs to be actualized or achieved. Desire is also neutral. We can desire valuable (‘I want to have integrity’) or dreadful (‘I want him dead’) things. So too can hope; both the Nazis and the Allies hoped fervently to win the war. My father, coming ashore in Normandy a few days after D-Day, hoped, I have to assume, for his own well-being and his army’s victory no less than the retreating Germans. Thus, what we praise or blame in this

¹⁸ On the distinction between the desires of adults and children and its role in both Aristotle and contemporary, neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, see Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 14.

¹⁹ Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 35.

view is not hope itself, which is neutral, but the value of the objects hoped for and the character of the person who desires them. Hope seems to be a faculty or capacity to desire in advance of any given object of desire. If this is so, then hope per se would not be positive or negative. It, like desire (and the emotions generally according to Aristotle, as well as Augustine), needs to be educated to intend proper objects.

How is desire related to emotion?²⁰ Desire can precede and direct emotion. (The opposite is probably also true.) I desire a new car so that I can feel the satisfaction or joy that my new car will bring me. I want to be in love with someone. I want not to feel jealous or afraid or contrite. Desire can be a means towards an emotional end. In this sense, desire is instrumental. (In the opposite case, desire follows from emotion. I can desire to get revenge on someone because I am angry with him.) If desire is often instrumental—it motivates us to think, act, or feel in certain ways—is hope also instrumental? In those senses where ‘to hope’ is more or less equivalent to ‘to want; to desire’ it has a strongly instrumental quality. But, in another sense, hope presents itself to us as more fundamental than desire, as an *orientation to the world* that underlies the act of desiring, as when we say, ‘She is hopeful that she will survive and therefore desires to undergo chemotherapy’. Hope seems to be a basic orientation or attitude towards the world on the basis of which the desire to act in a certain way or to refrain from acting makes sense. In this sense, we can speak, as Ernst Bloch does, of the ‘hopeful consciousness’. As we shall see below, Aquinas explicitly considered the question of whether hope is equivalent to desire and rejected the equation. Hope is the tutor of desire.

If hope has to do with a fundamental orientation or attitude towards the world, perhaps it is a disposition, a tendency that underlies our capacity for relevant beliefs and actions. Although Aristotle does not address hope in this context, his notion of a disposition may shed light on the workings of hope. Disposition refers to the cumulative effect of innumerable decisions and actions, coupled with our particular natural endowments, which we have not been free to choose. Disposition

²⁰ For a good analysis of this complex topic, see G. F. Schueler, *Desire: Its Role in Practical Reason and the Explanation of Action* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), ch. 1. Desire ranges from relatively simple, ‘unmotivated’ wants, e.g., desiring water because one is thirsty, to ‘motivated’ wants such as knowing that one will desire water in the future after one runs a race. Desire is related to reasoning and justification in complex ways.

orients us towards virtuous or vicious actions. By doing just acts in the manner of just men, a just man is produced. Habitual action disposes us, creates a disposition in us, towards future noble acts. A virtuous man, in Aristotle's account, chooses the good as if by second nature owing to the acquired disposition towards good actions.²¹ He does not grimly follow a rule of conduct or struggle against a refractory nature. Rather, he takes delight in his choosing of the good. This delight is a sign that he is actualizing a disposition towards the good; he is acting in accordance with what has become his own nature.

Hope is in some ways like this. We become accustomed to hope by persuading ourselves, by training ourselves, to take a hopeful view. Although some people seem to be outfitted by nature with a hopeful consciousness ('born optimists') many of us (William James's 'twice born') secure the ability to hope by struggling to ward off anxious or dire interpretations of our situation. We have to persuade ourselves of the rational implausibility or of the moral irresponsibility of believing the always seductive 'worst case scenario'. Hope is strengthened by habit. Habit emerges on the basis of complex and ongoing evaluations of desired ends and defensible means. If we are, as the evolutionary biologists would have it, hardwired for hope, we still have hard work to do in the business of hoping.

A disposition forms a second nature within us and gives us a sense that our actions conform as if by nature to what we are. By acting in accordance with this 'nature' we feel pleasure or take delight in what we choose to do, or in how we choose to be. A disposition, although instrumental, also acquires the aspect of an end in itself. We sense that we are, to some degree, our dispositions. Hope also has this character. To some extent, hope is instrumental; it is a way of projecting us beyond the present towards a desired future, of enabling us to transcend present constraints or, in what I will later argue is its conservative expression, to retain something valued against the entropy of time. But hope also has the character of an end in itself. Regardless of the eventual outcome of our hopeful intentions, *being hopeful in the moment can be expressive of our dignity as persons*. To have achieved the proper measure of hope is to have achieved something inherently valuable. There is a satisfaction in accepting ourselves as beings capable of hope, of recognizing ourselves, in the striking phrase of Scripture, as

²¹ Aristotle, *Ethics*, bk II, sect. 3.

‘prisoners of hope’. Theologians make much of this. They decouple hope from its possible objects and see hope itself as a valued form of life. Some, such as the French Catholic thinker Gabriel Marcel, distinguish between a rather shallow, object-oriented type of hope and a more profound, metaphysical type of hope as the conviction of meaningfulness.²² The Jewish thinker, Martin Buber, makes a similar, albeit less systematic, distinction. To the extent that such distinctions are cogent they may arise from the ambiguous character of dispositions as both means for and ends of moral action.

Hope as a disposition is a promising point of departure, richer than hope as a passion or as desire but not exclusive of elements of them. None the less, it does not carry us far enough for, in Aristotle’s account, dispositions are morally neutral. We have dispositions towards both virtue and vice. Indeed, for Aristotle, most men are more disposed towards vice than towards virtue, for ‘men are good in but one way, but bad in many’.²³ We could say that this is true of hope as well. For, as we have seen, we can hope both for noble and ignoble, elevated and wicked things. Indeed, much of what we hope for day in and day out, given the crooked timber of humanity, as Kant put it, is probably petty and self-serving. Perhaps we should say that hope is morally neutral and leave it at that. I am reluctant to do so, however, for such a view slights the value that we impute to or find in hope in our stream of culture. As Jews or Christians or, typically, Americans, we do not treat hope primarily as neutral. We locate a particular worth in it. In so far as hope is praiseworthy for us, I would like to trace that judgement and the intuition on which it rests all the way down. I would like to find a category that underwrites our positive evaluation. That category is virtue.

Is hope then best described as a virtue, the fruit of a disposition towards the good? Aristotle does not, as mentioned above, value hope in this manner. What references to hope as may be found in his corpus, as we shall see in Chapter 3, are either neutral or ambivalent, verging on the negative. He sometimes treats hope as a normal human

²² This distinction between, as he puts it, ‘ultimate hope’ and ‘fundamental hope’, hope that has an object however elevated and hope that is a basic trust in the meaningfulness of the world, is constitutive of the analysis of Godfrey in Joseph Godfrey, *A Philosophy of Human Hope* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987). This is, in my judgement, the best available contemporary philosophical study of hope.

²³ Aristotle, *Ethics*, bk II, sect. 6 (1106b 35).

function, as when, for example, he discusses whether boys can be called happy, and, concluding that they cannot, says that they 'are being congratulated by reason of the hopes we have for them', i.e., for their future possibilities.²⁴ He sometimes treats hope, in a typically Greek manner, with suspicion and disparagement.

Aristotle's medieval Christian disciple, Thomas Aquinas, however, does analyse—and elevate—hope to the status of a virtue. To be more precise, Aquinas first categorizes hope in a naturalistic, Aristotelian way, as a passion, and then develops a more explicitly theological account of hope as a virtue. Tracing Aquinas's passage from hope as a passion to hope as virtue will allow us a more detailed view into the complexities of categorizing hope and the possibilities opened by the idea that hope should be considered a virtue. I will leave a detailed exploration of this move to the next chapter. Here, I simply want to continue to raise preliminary questions about what a virtue analysis of hope would commit us to hold.

It may be, as I have suggested, that hope can be thought of as a virtue only within a stream of civilization that tells a certain story about the nature of reality. Biblical culture, both in the Hebrew Scriptures and in the New Testament, is infused with hope. Biblical culture praises the man or woman who trusts in God, which means, in part, in God's promises to bring about both a collective redemption and an individual salvation. The biblical orientation is towards restoration, redemption, consummation. God has created a world and launched a project of civilization in which an end is anticipated, an end that will bring justice, reconciliation, and joy. Perhaps only in a culture in which such expectations are alive does hope take on a visage of virtue. Perhaps what virtue means here is exemplary fidelity to the deepest value of the culture: trust in its Lord and His promises. Indeed, what gets Aquinas, as we shall see, from a naturalistic, Aristotelian analysis of hope as a passion to a biblically oriented analysis of hope as a 'theological virtue' is recourse to a higher wisdom made known to us only by revelation. Were it not for revelation, hope would remain a passion. Minimally, a set of background beliefs of a religious kind seem necessary for the elevation of hope to virtue. Yet, even in a culture in which overtly religious beliefs may be declining, the axiological residue of those beliefs lingers. Ours is a culture that valorizes hope because ours

²⁴ Aristotle, *Ethics*, bk I, sect. 9 (1099b 32).

was, and in some measure still is, a culture etched by biblical faith. If a virtue analysis of hope is correct, then we shall need to attend throughout to the connections of hope and faith.

Another issue raised by an analysis of hope as a virtue is the nexus of hope and reason, the cognitive dimension of hope. Considering hope as a virtue draws our attention to the rational and volitional elements involved in hoping. Virtue entails choice and belief. If we fight on the battlefield more out of fear of our officers than out of fear of our enemies, as Frederick the Great recommended, we may fight well but we would not fight out of courage. As a virtue, courage entails awareness—we choose to be courageous, however natural it has become for us through training and habit, i.e., through the acquisition of dispositions. *Being courageous also means that we can give reasons for the superiority of courage over cowardice.* We can enter into a rational conversation about how courage contributes to a well-lived life. Thus, hope, in so far as it is a virtue, has a strongly rational dimension.

What does this rational dimension imply? Let us raise another objection. Perhaps, in so far as hope entails belief and evaluation, hope is best described as a type of belief *tout court*. The typical ways in which we speak about hope involve statements such as ‘James hopes that it will not rain tomorrow’ or ‘Paula hopes that her son will return soon’. We can represent such sentences abstractly as ‘A hopes that Q’, where A signifies an agent and Q signifies a proposition, typically about a future event or state of affairs. In such sentences, A’s hope that Q can be reduced to some extent to A’s belief that Q has some degree of probability. For if A did not believe that Q is possible it would be absurd to hope for Q. Furthermore, if A did not believe that Q is at least probable, it would be unreasonable to hope for Q. In the work of the contemporary analytic philosopher, J. P. Day, these considerations loom large. Day analyses all of the typical ways we speak about hope (‘hope locutions’) in logical terms as statements about probability. As statements about the future, or at least what the agent imagines to be the future (for one can think ‘I hope that she will arrive safely’ when, in fact, she has already been killed on the way), they are neither true nor false. Thus, hope locutions embody beliefs, usually evaluative beliefs, about the future. These beliefs can be reasonable or unreasonable, depending upon the degree of probability attached to the object of hope, but they cannot be, at least at the time of thought

or utterance, true or false. Is hope then merely a name for a class of probabilistic beliefs?

Despite the strongly cognitive cast of his analysis, Day does not simply identify hope with belief. Although hope entails 'belief in some contingent future bringing good', belief is different from hope. 'The chief difference is that Hope and Fear are cognitive-conative-affective, whereas Belief is only cognitive.' Hope and fear entail desire, which belief does not. Hope and fear involve pleasure and pain, 'whereas Belief is neither pleasant nor painful'.²⁵ Hope is a probabilistic belief towards which the believer takes a certain positive attitude. The preferred term that Day uses for hope is a 'propositional attitude', a term coined by Bertrand Russell, which indicates an attitude taken towards a proposition about a future event or state of affairs.²⁶ When James hopes that it will not rain tomorrow, he both believes that there is a probability of a dry day and has an attitude, a feeling of pleasure, towards that possibility. By linking 'proposition' and 'attitude' Day wants to emphasize the 'cognitive-conative-affective' nexus of hope, as well as fear.

This account, all too briefly sketched, has the strength of tying hope to cognition. It fully recognizes the intellectual dimension of hope; hope often involves belief and beliefs are subject to criteria of reasonableness or unreasonableness. We do evaluate hope along these lines. We speak of false hopes, improbable hopes, as well as of well-founded hopes. This account also tries to relate the intellectual dimension of hope to its emotive aspects, a necessary conjunction. Unlike the earlier accounts of the English philosophical tradition, those of Hobbes and Hume, which stressed the emotive dimension and saw the cognitive one as subsidiary, this account reverses that ordering.

None the less, Day's approach has the weakness of scanting our propensity for the strong evaluation of hope. We do not only judge hope along the axis of reasonableness or unreasonableness relative to the probability of what is hoped for. As we have seen, we often praise hopefulness and counsel against despair not merely as an emotion but as an orientation. We judge hope along the axis of moral excellence or deficiency. We judge the nobility or baseness or what people hope for *and* we judge them for their hopefulness or their deficit of hope. We

²⁵ Day, 'Hope: A Philosophical Analysis', 61–2.

²⁶ The attitude can be shown to be distinct from the content of the proposition, yet the two are linked.

treat hope as a virtue or, for philosophers such as Schopenhauer or Nietzsche, as a vice. Furthermore, for those thinkers, primarily within Judaism and Christianity, who see hope as a fundamental orientation, an underlying conviction of the meaningfulness of life, 'hope locutions' cannot easily be expressed in propositional form of the sort 'A hopes that Q'. Categorizing hope primarily as belief misses those dimensions of hope that cannot be grouped under the rubric of beliefs, although Day's insistence that hope is a 'propositional attitude' mitigates this somewhat. 'Attitude' does not seem forceful enough to capture what Marcel and others aim at when they refer to 'fundamental hope'. Day could always reply, of course, that such theologizing merely muddies the waters and includes beliefs and attitudes under hope that are more properly described by other terms. He might say that 'I hope that I don't miss my train' and 'I hope that I go to heaven' have the same semantic and logical form. (Although he would find the first locution more reasonable than the second because, given his outlook, its probability is higher.) But a statement of unailing and fundamental hope such as that which underlies Job's affirmation, 'Even though he slay me yet will I trust him' does not fit this form. Day could say that such locutions are not about hope. They are ways of sense making, rationally grounded or not, rather than ways of hoping.

Such an objection asks us to narrow our view of hope, I think, to something like Hobbes' position that hope is desire for some absent object coupled with a calculation of the probability of achieving success. It cuts hope off from the deeper currents of the human struggle to secure sense and place in the world. Hope is not just about acquisition and prediction. It is also about wrestling with our demons and living by our better angels. It is about conquering fear, banishing despair, renewing our power for love and work. Or so it is among those who draw their inspiration from the broad lines of the biblical story, whether that stops, as for Jews, with the Hebrew Scriptures, or continues, as for Christians, with the Greek. How we characterize hope, it appears, is inseparable from what we expect from it. If we do not find hope to be an especially powerful, praiseworthy, and crucial orientation towards the conduct of life, then we may be content with categorizing it as an emotion or a propositional attitude. However, if hope per se has a normative force for us then we shall require an analysis, such as Aquinas's aretaic view, that accounts for its normativeness. To that analysis we now turn.

2

The Virtue of Hope

Two medieval theologians, the Christian Thomas Aquinas (c.1225–74) and the Jew Joseph Albo (?–?1444), wrote systematic philosophical accounts of hope. There is some evidence that the latter was broadly influenced by the former, particularly in his division and discussion of natural, conventional, and divine law. Although one cannot discern the direct influence of Aquinas on Albo's treatment of hope, the spirit of scholasticism, with its penchant for careful conceptual distinctions, is alive in his work. Both Aquinas and Albo probe the varieties of hope and of its objects, the risk of hope, and the transformation of hope from a purely natural endowment to a modality of communion with the divine. Both, in their own philosophical and theological idioms, chart a passage from passion to virtue and elevate the experience of hope. Let us consider their arguments on their own terms and then determine to what extent we can appropriate such arguments on the terms of a democratic age.

Aquinas: Hope as a Passion

Aquinas's account of the passions continued many of the emphases of its Aristotelian predecessor while adapting Aristotle to the requirements of a Christian theological milieu.¹ Like Aristotle, Aquinas understands the soul as form to the body's matter and divides the soul into three types or levels: the nutritive, the sensitive, and the rational, each of which has separate powers. At the sensitive level, the soul has two powers: the power of apprehension and the power of

¹ My treatment here follows the excellent account of Susan James in her *Passion and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth-century Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), ch. 3.

appetite. Apprehension perceives the external world; appetite is drawn to or repelled from what is apprehended. These powers are passive; their joint operation is the basis for the 'passions'. A passion is a passive potency, a capacity of the soul to experience something in response to external causes. Passions are actualized when external causes play relevantly upon the sensitive level of the soul.² Aquinas arrives at this view through a comparative consideration of both human beings and animals, for both seem capable of passionate responses, such as fear, to the world.

Both human beings, who have reason, and animals, which do not, are capable of purposive action based on passionate responses to the world. Both humans and animals perceive the world through their sensitive souls and respond to it. A sheep, for example, sees another animal at a distance—a wolf—and assembles the various inputs it derives from its senses into a sensible form, which it retains in its imagination. In order to turn and flee from the wolf, however, it must associate the form with the 'judgement' that the wolf is an enemy. It does this through a natural capacity, the *aestimatio naturalis*, that lends the non-sensory quality 'enemy' to the assemblage of sense impressions that form the wolf in the imagination of the sheep. Associating the sensible form of the wolf with the 'judgement' that it is an enemy, the sheep runs. Humans do much the same thing, but the process of reasoning—still within the sensitive, not the rational level of the soul—is more developed. Humans perceive the wolf and then assess it. It may be an enemy; it may not. Humans don't merely look, listen, react, and run. They don't 'process' information; they synthesize, analyse, and evaluate it.

Aquinas locates the quasi-rational ability to do this in the appetite. The sensitive soul has two powers: apprehension and appetite. (These parallel, in Aquinas's theory of mind, a similar division in the rational soul between pure intellect, where thinking takes place, and will, where volition and choice occur.) Apprehension or perception is the power by which we come to know the properties of external things. Appetite, however, is the 'inclination towards or away from an external object'. Appetite registers the attractive or repellant effects that external things have on us. Both appetite and apprehension, the

² See Peter King, 'Aquinas on the Passions', in Brian Davies (ed.), *Thomas Aquinas: Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 356.

two powers of the sensitive soul, are passive. They register what is done to us. They give rise to the passions, some of which have bodily or what we would call 'feeling' aspects. 'When the sensible soul apprehends... its appetites are accompanied by physical alterations that are essential to them. Anger, for example, is a boiling of blood around the heart'.³ The passions, most generally, are motions of attraction and repulsion to objects and states of affairs that human beings regard as beneficial or harmful.

Aquinas further divides the appetitive domain of the sensitive soul into two powers, each of which serves as a rubric for his detailed list of eleven passions (six fall under one power, five under the other). Based on a distinction in Aristotle, Aquinas subdivides appetite into the 'concupiscible' and the 'irascible' appetites. Given that appetite has an object (I love this woman; I fear this lion), the concupiscible-irascible distinction expresses the difference between passions that easily obtain their object and passions that attain their object only with difficulty.

For we have stated in the First Part (Q. 81, Art. 2) that the object of the concupiscible power is sensible good or evil, simply apprehended as such, which causes pleasure or pain. But, since the soul must of necessity, experience difficulty or struggle at times in acquiring some such good, or in avoiding some such evil, in so far as such good or evil is more than our animal nature can easily acquire or avoid; therefore this very good or evil inasmuch as it is of an arduous or difficult nature, is the object of the irascible faculty. Therefore whatever passions regard good or evil absolutely, belong to the concupiscible power; for instance, joy, sorrow, love, hatred and such like; whereas those passions which regard good or bad as arduous, through being difficult to obtain or avoid, belong to the irascible faculty; such are daring, fear, hope and the like.⁴

The force of this distinction is that concupiscible passions are unmediated responses to present good and evil while irascible passions are tied to appraisals of future good or evil. Furthermore, irascible passions arise in the awareness that human effort is required to fulfil them. One can find joy (a concupiscible passion) in the pleasures of a landscape, for example, that one sees now. But, to hope (an irascible passion) to

³ James, *Passion and Action*, 56.

⁴ *Summa Theologica*, 5 vols. (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1970), ii. 694 (Pts I-II, Q. 23, Art. 1).

return to the place to see it again is tied to the awareness that one will have to do something in the future. To say that hope is an irascible passion is to say that hope entails an awareness of the need for human effort.

Aquinas raises eight questions about the nature of hope: whether hope is the same as desire; whether hope is more intellectual than appetitive; whether animals are capable of hope; whether the contrary of hope is despair; whether experience is a cause of hope; whether hope abounds in young men and drunkards; how hope is related to love, and how hope is related to action.⁵ As this is one of the most extensive considerations of the topic of hope in the Western canon I shall consider some of its most salient points.

Aquinas begins his analysis by raising the question, as we did in the previous chapter, of how hope is related to desire *per se*. Hope, as an irascible passion, intends the acquisition of a future good that is *difficult* but *possible* to attain. Desire, by contrast, may be present or future-oriented but needn't take account of difficulty or possibility. In Aquinas's view, desire can be an expression of a mere wish. One might desire to sprout wings and fly away but, in Aquinas's terms, one cannot hope for this. Hope entails a realistic appraisal of possibility. Desire does not. Yet, different as hope is from desire, it presupposes it, for 'all irascible passions presuppose the passions of the concupiscible faculty'.⁶ Hope is a passion that involves the extension of appetite towards a future good conceived as possible to attain, albeit with difficulty.

The problem with this analysis, however, is that it implies that hoping is a cognitive move—an evaluation or appraisal of possibility, of the possibility of action, etc.—rather than a mere passion, which, after all, is not primarily a cognitive endeavour. Aquinas explicitly rejects categorizing hope as belonging to the 'cognitive power', that is, to the rational or intellective soul, and affirms that hope belongs to the appetite of the sensitive soul, the proper seat of the passions. Hope is an appetitive 'stretching out' towards the good. It is a movement—and movement is a function of appetite. Cognition, in Aquinas's epistemology, is not a movement outward from the knower to the known, but an assimilation by the soul of the object of cognition. The form of a particular object, say, a stone, enters the cognizer's soul. Cognition is

⁵ *Ibid.* 759 (Pts I–II, Q. 40).

⁶ *Ibid.*

an accounting for the known as it comes to inhere in the knower.⁷ Although hope, as appetitive, is not a cognitive process, it requires cognition. The cognitive power ‘moves the appetite’ by presenting objects to it. It now appears that the evaluative, calculative dimensions of hope inhere in apprehension, in the apprehensive domain of the sensitive soul, presenting already conceptualized objects to appetite, which react by being drawn towards or away from them. Aquinas has preserved hope qua passion at the expense of isolating its cognitive dimensions and making them distinct and prior to the *passional* movement of hope. Apprehension produces a meaningful representation of an external object (a stream of sounds, for example, is apprehended as a meaningful verbal locution, say, an insult) to which the appetite responds passionately (in this case, with anger).

Owing to this relegation of the cognitive aspect of hope to another faculty than appetite, Aquinas is able to argue, counter-intuitively, that animals, which are all appetite and not at all intellect, can and do hope. This must strike us as odd. Its oddness is augmented by the fact that Aquinas has already argued that hope is about the future, and animals, lacking cognition, cannot conceive of the future; they live in the present. The present is the realm of things that can be seen, not things that can be hoped for. Animals are moved by the things they see, and, citing Augustine who glosses Romans 8: 24, ‘Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?’ Hope is about something unseen, something future, and thus wholly beyond an animal’s ken. Aquinas tries to overcome these objections. A dog, seeing a rabbit far off, will not run to it if he reckons that it is too far for him to catch. The dog is able to make some appraisal, as it were, of possibility and difficulty. Similarly, although the dog does not conceive of the future, it has ‘a natural instinct to something future, as though it foresaw the future’. Aquinas is able to make such claims because of his belief in a divine Author of nature who has implanted instincts in animals, which give them a facsimile of cognition, although they do not, strictly speaking, cognize. Animals, therefore, are capable of the passions of hope (and despair) but the intellectual dimensions are left to the divine intellect which works through Creation. The relations between hope, as a passion, and intellect or reason are complicated, to say the least.

⁷ For a concise discussion, see Scott MacDonald, ‘Theory of Knowledge’, in Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 160–2.

The fourth matter Aquinas takes up is whether despair is the proper contrary of hope. Given that, following Aristotle, any one thing has only one contrary, is not fear more properly the opposite of hope than despair? Furthermore, given that hope is a movement of the appetite towards a desired good, despair seems to be a kind of immobility, a paralysis, rather than a movement of any kind. How then can it be contrary to the movement that is hope? Aquinas answers that hope (*spes*) and despair (*desperatio*) are related both etymologically and phenomenologically. Phenomenologically, despair is a kind of movement; it is a movement of repulsion. When the appetite grasps that a desired object is unobtainable—when hope is not possible—a movement of withdrawal occurs. Hope and despair are linked then as are attraction and withdrawal. But what about fear? Is not that properly contrary to hope? Aquinas sees both fear and despair as contraries of hope, albeit in different ways. Fear is contrary to hope with respect to the status of the object—in the case of hope, the hoped for object is good; in the case of fear, the feared object is evil. Despair is contrary to hope with respect to the movement of attraction or repulsion.⁸ That is, the soul is doing different things when it fears and when it despairs. When it fears, it is dreading an evil object, an evil eventuality. When it despairs, it is fleeing from the frustration of an unattainable although good object. Fear is an appraisal of evil. Despair is a reaction to the impossibility of good.⁹

Aquinas next turns to the relationship between hope and experience. Is experience a cause of hope? One objection is that experience belongs to cognition, whereas hope is an appetite. Aquinas's answer leads us into the existence conditions for hope. Hope is not a 'raw feel' like the pain that results from touching fire. Hope is not, it seems, primordial. Rather, it is nurtured—caused—by our interaction with things such as riches or strength, or by specific experiences, for example, such as training in a certain art or skill. If you know that you can do something well, you will act with hope and confidence in your

⁸ Aquinas's taxonomy of the passions does not require that the pairs be exclusive and exhaustive. As Peter King writes, 'Instead, the different passions are specified by a multiplicity of criteria that allow several coordinate kinds at the same level and different modes of opposition between different pairs of passions . . .' ('Aquinas on the Passions', in Brian Davies (ed.), *Thomas Aquinas: Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 359).

⁹ *Summa Theologica*, ii, 761–2 (Pts I–II, Q. 40, Art. 4).

abilities. Riches and strength increase a person's power and put one into a hopeful frame of mind. These possessions and attributes make things possible that would not otherwise be possible. They therefore expand the range of future goods for which we might hope, thereby expanding hope per se. Even teaching and persuasion, by making a 'man think that he can obtain something', may be a cause of hope.¹⁰ In this way, hope is corrigible. What seemed hopeless before the acquisition of knowledge, say, through teaching, now seems possible. Experience, especially the acquisition of knowledge, can be a cause of hope. Knowledge, cognition, shapes the environment in which apprehension does its work and appetite takes shape.

Of course, experience, as Aquinas admits, cuts both ways. For experience, or the knowledge gained in experience, can 'cause a lack of hope; because just as it makes a man think possible what he had previously thought impossible so, conversely, experience makes a man consider as impossible that which hitherto he had thought possible'.¹¹ For this reason, Aquinas echoes Aristotle's observation that the old are deficient in hope for they have learned through experience that less is possible than the young imagine. Conversely, 'folly and inexperience can be a cause of hope accidentally as it were, by removing the knowledge which would help one to judge truly a thing to be impossible'.¹² Experience therefore can both augment and diminish hope. It is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for hope.

This last observation brings Aquinas to a rather negative appraisal of the implications of hope in a manner reminiscent of the Greeks. We will consider such negative views in more detail in the next chapter. Here it must only be remarked that Aquinas shares Aristotle's rather critical attitude towards the hopeful confidence of youth and, similarly, to the intoxicated bravado of drunkards. Aquinas does not exclude their enthusiasms from the category of hope. He explicitly argues, in response to his sixth question, that both youth and drunkenness are causes of hope and 'for the same reason all foolish and thoughtless persons attempt everything and are full of hope'.¹³ Aquinas is able to hold this view because he has made hope a function of appetite rather than intellect. In the absence of intellect, not every

¹⁰ *Summa Theologica*, ii. 761–2 (Pts I–II, Q. 40, Art. 4). 762.

¹¹ *Ibid.* ¹² *Ibid.* ¹³ *Ibid.* 763.

good that hope intends is necessarily a genuine good. Appetite can be confused about true goods, pursuing false goods that are injurious rather than beneficial. Appetite, after all, is not yet knowledge; appetite's estimation of goodness is not necessarily warranted by truth. This rather low evaluation of hope will need to be elevated if hope is to be not only a passion but a virtue.

Finally, Aquinas considers whether hope helps or hinders action.¹⁴ One might object that hope is a hindrance to action in so far as hope inspires a sense of security and could lead to indifference or negligence towards action. On the contrary, Aquinas asserts, hope is a help to action by 'making it more intense'. Hope arises, we recall, when the desired future good is attainable only with difficulty. '[T]he thought of its being difficult arouses our attention.' Hope, in Aquinas's terms, stimulates us to pursue what we hope for. It is a passion that is also a cause of action.

Aquinas's detailed analysis of hope qua passion has situated hope in appetite—the broad category of attraction and repulsion vis-à-vis external objects that Aquinas sees as constitutive of our animal nature, of the nature that we share with animate creatures. This dynamic sphere of pleasure-seeking attraction and pain-avoiding repulsion is categorically distinct from both theoretical and practical intellect and from will, all of which are situated in the rational or intellective part of the soul. None the less, this second-tier sensitive dimension of the soul does contain an element of reason appropriate to the evaluation of sensible forms, especially with respect to their pleasurable or painful consequences. This is still, however, a long way from those reasoned considerations that we know as the virtues. How does Aquinas get from hope as a passion to hope as a virtue?

Aquinas: Hope as a Virtue

In so far as Aquinas's theory of the virtues is a theologically tinged extension of Aristotle's, a brief review of Aristotelian teaching is in order. Virtues are dispositions that have both affective (feeling) and

¹⁴ I leave out of account here Aquinas's discussion of the relationship of love and hope at Q. 40, Art. 7.

intellectual (reasoning) aspects.¹⁵ A disposition is a state of the soul. But what kind of state is it? There are three kinds of state relative to the soul: there are passions (*pathē*), such as anger, fear, confidence, etc.; capacities (*dunameis*), the potential or capability for anger, fear, and so on; and dispositions (*hexeis*), in which we are ‘well off or badly off’ towards our passions, that is, ‘we are badly off towards getting angry, if we do it intensely or laxly, but well off if we do it in an intermediate way’.¹⁶ Virtues cannot be passions, as we are not praised or blamed for our passions per se. We are praised for our virtues or blamed for our vices, however. Nor do we choose our passions—they happen to us. Virtues, on the contrary, have to do with how we handle or act on our feelings and passions; they have to do with activity, with how we make ourselves. So, virtues are not passions; nor are virtues capacities. We have capacities, such as the capability of becoming joyous or irritated by nature. But virtue is about becoming good and we do not become good by nature; we become good through our own efforts. What is left then is the category of a state (*hexis*) in the sense of a stable disposition; of the propensity to act, to be disposed to act, in a relevant way.

A stable, as opposed to a fleeting, disposition may be built by habit but should not be confused with unthinking, reflexive action. Habits are also grounded in choice, in ongoing reflection on what sort of person I want to be as I seek my good. Virtue is a state involving choice (*hexis proairētikē*). Choice is informed by practical reason, which seeks the mean. Aquinas follows Aristotle’s definition of a virtue as ‘a habit of consistently choosing the mean as determined by reason and as a prudent man would determine it’.¹⁷ From a purely human point of view, there are only two kinds of virtue: intellectual (which perfects the mind) and moral (which perfects one’s actions). Virtue supervenes on both intellect and passion. One cannot really be virtuous unless one has both intellectual and moral virtues. The virtuous life is something of a seamless whole.

¹⁵ Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 48 ff. See also the review of Aristotle’s teaching on the virtues, with special relevance to its political implications in Peter Berkowitz, *Virtue and the Making of Modern Liberalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 7–14.

¹⁶ Cited in Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 49.

¹⁷ Ethics, bk II, sect. 6 (1106b 36) as quoted in Thomas Aquinas, *Treatise on the Virtues*, trans. John A. Oesterle (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1984), 90 (= Q. LIX, Art. 1).

So far, Aquinas hews to the Aristotelian line. But, now Aquinas makes a distinctively Christian move based on his understanding of the ends of life, which naturally differs from Aristotle's in so far as a Christian understanding of human ends must differ from a pagan one. Natural reason allows us to attain the intellectual and moral virtues, which suffice for the achievement of a virtuous, which is to say, rational and happy, *earthly* life. These, however, do not suffice for *eternal* bliss. Aristotelian *eudaimonia* is not Thomistic blessedness. The natural virtues order and perfect us according to our true human natures. But we are also participants in the divine nature and can realize a higher good. For this, we are given principles via revelation through which we can know God and perfect ourselves. These revealed principles, and the form of life shaped by internalizing them, are the 'theological virtues'.

Were Aquinas to have jumped directly from the intellectual and moral virtues to some alleged class of higher, theological virtues we might well accuse him of being suppositious. His line of argument, however, is more subtle. Aquinas alludes to the characterization of virtue in the neo-Platonic commentator on Cicero, Macrobius. Macrobius, following Cicero, holds (like Aquinas after him) that there are four cardinal virtues: prudence, temperance, fortitude or courage, and justice. Each of these virtues, however, has four modes or levels of realization: the political, the purifying or cleansing, the perfected, and the exemplar. This late antique classification scheme identifies four levels on which virtue may be deployed. On the lowest level (political virtue), the virtues of prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice are practised because they are necessary for a good life in the polity. A virtuous man, at this level, will be honest (just) in his public affairs or business dealings. But, neither public affairs, nor business dealings, nor the manner in which we execute them necessarily orient us towards a higher contemplative or metaphysically aware life. A (politically) virtuous man will be prudent, temperate, courageous, and just in political life. But there are ways of life higher than political life. Thus, the same virtues that have a political deployment can also be deployed so as to 'purify' or purge (*purgatorias*) us of excessively worldly concerns. Prudence, for example, can shift us from how we conduct a gregarious political life to a reconsideration of whether we should conduct a gregarious political life at all. Prudence can direct us to count worldly things as nothing and direct attention to the life of the soul. Those who have so purified themselves have perfected virtue.

'Thus prudence now sees only divine things, temperance knows no earthly desires, fortitude is oblivious to the passions and justice is united with the divine mind in an everlasting bond, by imitating it.'¹⁸ Finally, the 'exemplar' virtues are those which exist in the divine mind itself. To practise virtue in an exemplary way is *imitatio* and *communio dei* at once.¹⁹

It would be absurd to say that 'God is prudent' or 'God is temperate' if the only deployment of virtue were political. But, if these virtues direct the intellect and will, the apprehension and appetite, to the highest things, and if the highest things are in the divine, then virtue is a conduit to ultimate reality. Virtue exceeds the work of intellect and ethics and enters the hierarchy of being, returning the human to its emanative source in the divine. Aquinas prepares the way for the theological virtues by founding the hierarchy of virtues on a divine archetype. Quoting Augustine, he asserts 'the soul must follow something so that virtue can be born in it; and this something is God, and if we follow him we shall live a moral life'. The implication that he draws from this is that 'the exemplar of human virtue must pre-exist in God, just as the exemplars of all things pre-exist in Him. In this way, therefore, virtue can be considered as existing in its highest exemplification in God . . .'²⁰ In the great chain of being, virtue is the link.²¹ Thus, virtue discloses knowledge of the highest.

Human beings have an aptitude for virtue by nature, although it must be borne in mind that nature has been deformed by sin. Our own will and action can actualize our aptitude into the relevant intellectual and moral virtues. God can also assist us in the acquisition of these virtues. In the case of the theological virtues, however, God is the sole

¹⁸ Ethics, bk II, sect. 6 (1106b 36) as quoted in Aquinas, *Treatise on the Virtues*, 116 (= Q. LXI, Art. 5).

¹⁹ Macrobius, writing of the hierarchy of levels of virtue, says 'The first type of virtues [i.e. political] mitigates the passions, the second puts them away, the third has forgotten them, and to the fourth they are anathema' (*Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans. William Harris Stahl (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 123).

²⁰ Aquinas, *Treatise on the Virtues*, 116.

²¹ Note that Aquinas's linkage of divine (exemplar) virtues with purely human (political) virtues is only possible in so far as Aquinas believes in an analogy of being (*analogia entis*) between God and humanity. Terms such as 'justice' are not completely equivocal when applied to the divine and the human subjects. It makes eminent sense for Aquinas to describe God as virtuous while it makes no sense—indeed, it is the height of blasphemy—for Maimonides. A Christian is, by definition, an incarnational thinker; a Jew is not (see David Burrell on Aquinas and Islamic and Jewish thinkers in Kretzmann and Stump, *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, 75 ff.).

cause. The theological virtues are faith, hope, and charity. They are both means and ends. God infuses them in us, educates us to them by Scripture, and offers Himself as the object of our virtuous striving. The theological virtues exceed even the high intellectual virtue of wisdom. Wisdom refers to all that can be naturally grasped by human reason. Faith and hope, however, open onto a horizon of supernatural knowledge. They link us to the being of God in a way that wisdom, proportioned to natural objects of knowledge, cannot.

Hope, specifically, is the direction of the will to the supernatural end which God has prepared for us. Hope 'looks to that end as something possible to attain'.²² For Aquinas, the virtue of hope anticipates a blessedness that does not yet exist but considers it 'as something possible'. If this blessedness were a natural object of our attention, hope would imply a deficiency, a lack of knowledge. Hope qua passion *does* imply such a deficiency. Deficiency is incompatible with virtue in so far as virtue signifies strength and perfection. Aquinas concedes that, considered from a purely human or naturalistic point of view, 'faith and hope do imply a certain imperfection' in so far as 'hope is about things which are not yet had'.²³ If these 'things' were objects of unassisted human aspiration, then hope could not be considered a virtue. But in so far as these things, the supernatural things, are in God's power, hope surpasses the imperfection on which it seems to be founded and instead reveals a boundless confidence in the promises of God. The leap then from hope as a needy, appetitive passion to hope as a purifying or perfect or exemplar virtue depends on a cluster of putative religious realities: divine grace, which infuses us with theological virtues; divine revelation, which gives us knowledge, through scripture, of God's promises; and right reason, which gives us a rational warrant for our trust and confidence in God's promises. Without belief in these items, Aquinas cannot elevate hope from a passion to a virtue.

Albo on Hope

Albo's discussion of hope takes place primarily in three chapters of the fourth treatise of his book *Sefer Ha-Ikkarim*, the *Book of Principles*.²⁴ Written in the aftermath of bloody persecutions and mass conversions

²² Aquinas, *Treatise on the Virtues*, 122 (= Q. LXII, Art. 3).

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ All references to this work will be to Isaac Husik's edition. Joseph Albo, *Sefer Ha-Ikkarim: Book of Principles*, ed. and trans. Husik, i. and iv. (Philadelphia, Pa.: Jewish

by Spanish Jews to Christianity, the *Book of Principles* attempts to bring clarity to the perplexed question of obligatory beliefs in Judaism. Albo's purpose was philosophical, in an academic sense, but also passionately pastoral. He wanted to give Iberian Jewry intellectual clarity and courage during what became its last phase. He had participated in acrimonious Jewish–Christian disputations in Tortosa in 1413. The matter of determining necessary Jewish beliefs and defending them rationally was politically and spiritually exigent. The Mishnah and Talmud had initiated the discussion by excluding certain groups from a share in the world to come, on account of their sins (such as the people of Sodom or the generation of the Flood) and on account of the failure to affirm such beliefs as the biblical teaching of the resurrection of the dead and the divine origin of the Torah (M. Sanhedrin, ch. 10). The rabbinic literature, however, did not provide any specific guidance about the beliefs. It does not say exactly what one must believe or how one must believe; it merely indicates that one must not reject certain beliefs.²⁵

Maimonides (d. 1204) was the first to introduce philosophical rigour into the analysis of what Jews must believe to merit the 'world to come'. He specified thirteen fundamental, constitutive dogmas of Judaism, as well as the manner in which they are to be affirmed. (That is, Maimonides not only required that a Jew has to make assertions about, for example, the unity and incorporeality of God, but that a Jew has also to accept the neo-Platonic–Aristotelian, i.e., scientific, world picture in terms of which he explicated the beliefs.) Maimonides' novel attempt to formulate an obligatory Jewish creed set off a long debate among later philosophically minded rabbis. Albo's teacher, Hasdai Crescas, narrowed Maimonides' list of thirteen dogmas to six. Albo rejects both of their enumerations, finding fault with their underlying methodologies, and proposes that there are only three

Publication Society of America, 1930). Albo's discussion of hope—the most complete one that I have found in the medieval Jewish philosophical tradition—is anticipated to a small degree by Bahya Ben Joseph Ibn Pakuda in his *Book of Direction to the the Duties of the Heart*, trans. Menahem Mansoor (Portland, Oreg.: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004) in ch. 10, 426–46. Bahya distinguishes grades of hope and ties the highest grade to the divine.

²⁵ Thorough studies of the status of belief in ancient and medieval Jewish thought may be found in two books by Menachem Kellner: *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) and *Must a Jew Believe Anything?* (Portland, Oreg.: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2006).

fundamental principles constitutive of a perfect divine law. The book is therefore an extended conceptual analysis of the types (natural, conventional, and divine) of law, interrelations among these types, and their characteristics. Judaism exemplifies the perfect divine law. (Note that law, rather than the modern Western category of religion, is the operative framework for comparative and phenomenological analysis.) In Albo's account, there are three necessary principles (*ikkarim*) of a divine law: the existence of God, the revelation of the Torah, and reward and punishment. These give rise to subsidiary beliefs (*emunot* or *anafim*: literally, branches). The belief in the messiah, for example, is subsidiary—an implication of the principle of reward and punishment. Thus, one who denies the coming of the messiah has made a mistake, indeed, a sinful mistake, but one is not thereby a heretic. Albo drastically reduces the range of possibilities for falling into heresy (although not into intellectual error), thus comforting his people in the face of their lapses and giving them a smaller, more impregnable territory to defend. His minimization, in particular, of the importance of the belief in a messiah, as we will note below in Chapter 4, was meant to distinguish Judaism sharply from Christianity.

The fourth treatise explores the implications of the principle of reward and punishment. As such, it deals with such classic problems as freedom of the will vs. divine providence, theodicy as a crisis for providence, prayer, and repentance in relation to providence, the nature of resurrection and the world to come as prime instances of reward (and punishment), and the coming of the messiah. The discussion of hope occurs just after an essay on faith, in the sense of trust (*bitahon*) in God. In keeping with the grave challenge of his time, Albo asserts that a Jew can only know whether he or she has faith in God during a time of trial. It is easy to have faith in God and to keep his covenant when 'he enjoys peace and tranquility at home and prosperity in his business affairs'. 'He can', however, 'be sure [of his faith] only if he maintains his integrity when his fortune changes and poverty and affliction come upon him and press him to the last degree'.²⁶ Albo, who artfully combines philosophical argumentation with sermonic exegesis, cites various Psalms to show that the righteous trust God both when he favours them with blessings and when he seems to abandon them to hardship. Trust is thus a pre-eminent virtue. But is

²⁶ Albo, *Sefer Ha-Ikkarim*, iv. 449.

that always true? Couldn't trust also be a vice; a question Albo will later ask about hope. When one trusts in something that is impermanent, one has reasons to be ashamed of oneself; one's trust is unreliable and foolish (glossing Ps. 25: 2: 'my God, in You I trust; may I not be disappointed'). For trust to be a virtue, rather than a vice, it must be invested in a proper object. God, who is eternal and does not change, is the only appropriate 'object' for one's trust. To trust in God means never to be ashamed of one's deepest commitment.²⁷ To trust in God is to have a certainty (another dimension of the meaning of *bitaḥon*) that will not disappoint. To trust in God means to know that as flawed and sinful as one is one still has virtue within one. 'He who trusts in the LORD shall be surrounded with favour (*ḥesed*)' (Ps 32: 10). Trust draws divine *ḥesed* towards the one who trusts. Trust opens one to an experience of divine support and favour, a foretaste of redemption, as it were, in the present.

Although he has not drawn the distinction as sharply and philosophically as Aquinas, Albo implies that trust, and as we shall soon see, hope, are natural propensities, liable to mislead, but when affixed to a proper 'object' become virtuous. Although he does not use the word, trust and hope function as passions, with the potential to become virtues. This comes out strongly in his discussion of hope. A natural endowment is elevated to an excellence through intellectual discernment and moral praxis.

Albo begins by categorizing three aspects (*panim*) of hope: hope of mercy (*tikvat ha-ḥesed*); hope of glory (*tikvat ha-kavod*); and hope based on a promise (*tikvat ha-havtaḥa*). These categories refer not so much to *what* one hopes for as to *how* one hopes—that is, to ideas that inform the act of hope as well as to the emotional state of mind one has when one hopes. The 'hope of mercy' entails an understanding that God does not owe us his *ḥesed*. We do not deserve it in the sense that we deserve to be paid what we are owed. Accordingly, the 'hope of mercy' entails ideas about the graciousness of God and about the undeserving and sinful nature of man. These ideas affect our state of mind when we hope in this mode; we come as suppliants, profoundly humbled by our own unworthiness and therefore anxious and uncertain as to whether God will respond to us as we hope. The hope for mercy comes with a high degree of uncertainty about whether

²⁷ Albo also glosses Job 6: 20, Prov. 11: 28, and Jer. 17: 5 (*ibid.* 454).

our hope will be fulfilled. That uncertainty, although natural, is not unproblematic. Albo points to the deficit of trust or faith in God that the uncertainty implies. Our knowledge of our own unworthiness overwhelms our faith in God's generosity, as it were. The believer is caught between two competing and equally valid religious beliefs. The hope for mercy therefore entails considerable inner tension, vulnerability, and risk on the part of the one who hopes.

The 'hope of glory' entails the belief that, even though we might be unworthy, God has a stake in our well-being, if only for his own reputation or *kavod*. 'For if a master who has been in the habit of helping his servant fails to deliver him from trouble in a given instance, the people say that it is because of the master's inability'.²⁸ Like Moses, who beseeched God not to destroy Israel in the wilderness out of concern for His own reputation (e.g. Exod. 32: 12), the one who hopes based on divine *kavod* has some confidence that God will not damage Himself by failing to save His people. While one who hopes on the basis of mercy is quite uncertain of the outcome and therefore fretful, the one who hopes on the basis of divine glory is thus more confident. His state of mind is less anxious. There is, therefore, less merit, less virtue implicit in this form of hope. The one who hopes risks less and is less deserving of praise.

Finally, one who hopes on the basis of a promise and now hopes to collect on that promise can afford to be highly certain of the results (*batuah*) if the promise-maker is a man of truth (*ish emet*). Albo invokes the set of social understandings that are constitutive of social trust as the idea-complex relevant to this mode of hope. Although he calls this form of hope *tikvat ha-emet*, the hope of truth, we should not take this locution to imply that this form of hope is the most meritorious or honourable. On the contrary, if one can be certain that a promise-maker will keep a beneficial promise then this form of hope is devoid of existential investment; it is more a calculation than a hope.

An underlying dynamic of this analysis is that the successive forms of hope involve increasing levels of certainty. One has a greater epistemic right, so to speak, to believe that one's hope based on a promise will be fulfilled than one has to believe that God will grant one mercy. When Albo calls the hope based on a promise *tikvat ha-emet*, the hope

²⁸ Ibid. 458.

of truth, he indicates the necessary or coercive dimension of belief in this case. God's promises, in so far as they are God's and no one else's, *must* be believed.²⁹ Thus, this hope *cannot* be disappointed. As the hope of mercy has, apparently, the least certitude attached to it, it is the most praiseworthy. The one who hopes for mercy is the most virtuous, because he or she trusts God the most and therefore seems to risk the most.

It would be wrong, however, to make Albo sound like too much of an existentialist. In fact, the risk is only a matter of seeming, of appearance rather than reality. The hope for mercy only seems risky because we do not understand God adequately. If the one who hopes (*mikaveh*) understood God properly—as One who always wants to benefit his creatures—then one would hope 'properly' (*k'raoui*) and one's hope would surely be fulfilled. The failure to attain *hesed*, which God promises to those who hold him in awe, is a failure of proper hope. Proper hope *eo ipso* draws the divine *hesed* to the one who waits for it (Ps. 147: 11). If one's hope for mercy is disappointed, it is because the hope itself was not proper (*'ayn ha-tikvah k'raoui*).

It is hard to make sense of this latter claim as a causal explanation for disappointed hope. Does Albo seriously mean to argue that all hope for divine mercy will be fulfilled if one only hopes 'properly'? That would imply that 'hope cannot fail nor desire deceive', as the anthropologist Malinowski wrote about magic. Hope would become a kind of theurgy. To hope would be similar to the practice of magic: to engage in a technology of coercion directed towards the deity. Furthermore, hope would be immune from falsification. Any putative instance of disappointed hope could be directed back upon the agent: he failed to hope properly. *Real* hope is never disappointed, so the argument would run. Initially, Albo does seem to endorse such views. In defence of his position, he argues that possibilities (*efshariim*) fall into two categories, the merely possible (*shivoui*) and the necessary (*meyuhav*). It is equally possible that it will rain or not rain tomorrow, but it is necessary or certain that the sun will rise. The hope that a person entrusts in God is similar to the certainty that the sun will rise tomorrow. This certainty derives from the promises God made to Israel

²⁹ Albo, *Sefer Ha-Ikkarim*, iv. 462. Albo seems to follow his teacher, Hasdai Crescas, here on the involuntary or coercive nature of the assent to true belief.

through the prophets. Just as the watchmen in Psalms 130: 5–6 hope for the morning sun, so does Israel hope for the LORD. The promise of God, made known through the prophets, that he will redeem Israel has even greater certainty (*bitahon gadol yoter*) than the coming of the dawn.

It is important to note that Albo has shifted ground from his earlier, rather fantastic claim about the unimpeachable status of the hope for mercy to this argument about the reliability of divine promise as communicated by prophecy. The hope for mercy (which he has somewhat conflated with the hope based on a promise) relates to the entire nation. It is *Israel's* hope—not the individual Jew's—which cannot be disappointed. Indeed, Albo next moves to distinguish general hope (*klalit*) from particular hope (*helkit*). A Jew must always hope on behalf of his or her people. Albo notes that the Talmud (B. Shabbat 31a) asserts that the first question a Jew will be asked at the moment of judgement in the world to come is 'Did you hope for salvation?' That is, did you hope for the redemption of all Israel? Hope for divine mercy in this sense is as certain as Judaism itself; it is constitutive of Judaism. Not to hope—or to believe that such hope is in vain—is to vitiate the Torah. If this were all that Albo meant, then the difficulty of his view that real hope is never disappointed would be somewhat reduced. However, he continues to hold that the hope for mercy is an individual matter as well and, when held properly, is ineluctably fulfilled. If his view in the end avoids derision, it is because of another distinction, which he introduces—the distinction between hope for mercy and hope for reward (*tikvat skhar*). One must hope that

God in his compassion and abundant mercy, will make his way straight, will deliver him from harm, and will choose what is good and suitable for him, by putting it in his heart to choose the good and reject the evil . . . And he must not despair (*lo yityaesh*) of hoping in the Lord in all of his doings on account of fear of his sins, for God's providence always comes to those who hope for mercy, not to those who hope for reward.³⁰

Thus, one can, indeed one ought to, hope for certain blessings for oneself but not on the basis of desert. One has an epistemic right to expect that that hope will be fulfilled when one hopes on the basis of an idea of divine mercy. Forming a hope on this basis is inherently

³⁰ Ibid. 464.

praiseworthy: it marks the one who hopes as a pious person. Such hope reveals virtue, which is not the case when one merely hopes for a reward. Hope for a reward we might say is a merely natural disposition. It is a matter of giving and taking; *do ut des*. It may reflect some incipient concept of justice but it does not reflect an excellence of character. By contrast, the virtue that one demonstrates in continuing to hope in God, under the most adverse circumstances, does demonstrate excellence. In particular, it manifests a courage that repudiates despair. Quoting Lamentations (3: 32) ‘For though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies’, Albo affirms: ‘Therefore I do not despair that I will emerge from my troubles.’³¹ The character of hope as a virtue is evident here in the opposition between it and despair. Despair, not mere fear, is the proper contrary of hope. One is a habit of cultivated trust and confidence in God, despite the disconfirming evidence of dreadful circumstances. The other acquiesces in those circumstances; it reveals a willingness to be broken by the trials of life. This is unworthy of a Jew.

The most generous reading of Albo then pays close attention to what the hopeful agent expects. If the hopeful agent expects reward—the mechanical granting of his wishes as if from a fairy godmother—the agent can expect to be disappointed. If the hopeful agent expects *hesed*—which is not equivalent to any enumerable favours or benefits—such a person can expect God to show faith to him or her. That faithful, covenantal loyalty may not be immediately translatable into worldly goods or benefits, such as the cessation of *these* troubles *now*. It can make itself known in the sense of support, divine closeness, non-abandonment, inner fortitude, and rectitude that is harder to quantify or individualize, but no less real.

Albo provides an additional layer of complexity to the distinctions that he has so far introduced. Hope is consummated or completed (*yishalem*) in prayer. Particular hope, in its three basic modes, expresses itself in *and is fulfilled* in prayer. If the hope and prayer of the agent are of the proper kind (*k’fi mah she-raout*) ‘there is no reason why it should not be fulfilled, since there is no niggardliness in the giver, and when one prays for the thing he hopes for, he shows that his hope is real,

³¹ Albo, *Sefer Ha-Ikkarim*, iv. 465.

therefore he is prepared to receive the hoped for mercy'.³² Albo appears to expect that prayer—proper, heartfelt prayer expressive of *tikvat ha-hesed*—will, *must*, be answered, for it is of the essence of God to give of himself without stint or pause. One might say that the experience of prayer, as a *communio dei*, is its own fulfilment. Albo's language—'particular hope will achieve and complete (*tage'ah v'tishalem*) the intention of the one who hopes (*kavanat ha-mikaveh*) with the prayer (*tefillah*)'—suggests both that prayer will be answered and that prayer is, in a sense, itself the answer. Prayer both communicates the plea for *hesed* to God and gives the reply, as *hesed*, from God. By hoping and praying, one has taken action, made oneself prepared (*yukhan likabbel ha-hesed*) to receive what is hoped for.³³ As in Aquinas, hope is arduous; it is tied to something that one must do, even must struggle to do.

It is different, however, with general hope. The apparent reason, according to Albo, that Israel as a nation has not been redeemed is because it hasn't properly hoped, prayed, and prepared itself sufficiently. Every individual Jew would have to hope as one for the redemption in order for such a hope/prayer to be answered. Since not all Jews urgently hope for the redemption and only a few of them are prepared for it, God has not yet fulfilled this hope. When they do, it will be fulfilled. Or, citing the Talmud, even if they fail to do so, God will bring the end in his own time. General hope depends upon time; particular hope does not.

Without employing the exact terms, Albo clearly considers hope a virtue in the sense that to hope in the proper manner for the proper reasons is to display exemplary traits. This assumption allows him to parry the criticism that hope may be, in the end, illusory or wishful thinking. He asks whether hope and expectation (*tikva v'tohelet*) may not be good for human nature (*teva ha-adam*) in so far as they disturb our thought, diminish our strength, and bring a great sickness into our souls. Hope may lead to obsessive thinking, to an *idée fixe*, which disconcerts the one who hopes and reduces his ability to function rationally. Albo raises what we might call 'Greek' criticisms against 'Hebrew' convictions. After enumerating the bad consequences that might flow from hope, he invokes a biblical text, Hosea 12: 7: 'Practise goodness and justice, and constantly trust (= *kiveh*, or 'hope') in your

³² Ibid. 466–7.

³³ Ibid.

God.' How can the prophet urge hope above all things if hope has a vicious character?

Albo's answer returns us to his view about degrees of certainty. Hope for an outcome about which the agent is uncertain (*misupak*) does in fact disturb the mind. Hope for something about which the agent is certain, that is, has deep trust (*muvtah*), may be awaited with confidence.

This is the kind of hope one must have in God. One must trust implicitly that God will fulfill one's hope without doubt, since He has the power and there is none to prevent Him. But one must not have the kind of hope in which one doubts whether the thing will come or not. Such hope as we have described strengthens the heart and makes it glad, as we read: 'Be strong and let your heart take courage, all ye that wait for the Lord (Ps. 31: 25).' Hope in God, far from weakening the heart strengthens it, for if one hopes in God and his heart truly relies on the Holy One of Israel, trusting that He will grant his request, he gets stronger and more courageous . . . [T]hose that wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, and the more strength they have the more they will be able to hope, and the hope in turn which God for its object, who is a permanent being, will further increase their strength, the two mutually reacting upon each other, hope causing strength and strength in turn causing hope.³⁴

The virtues work in tandem; a person who has excellence in one domain of character is likely to have excellence in others. Hope, faith (that is, trust), and courage rise together. Hope and overall strength of heart potentiate one another. For Albo, this seems to be more than a natural or immanent process; hope is a way of communing with a 'permanent being' such that something of the power of that permanence informs one's own being. By contrast, one must not hope in a merely natural way. Here, the arguments of those who see a vicious aspect to hope are on the mark. Doubt and uncertainty can derange the mind of man. The only alternative is to be a man of faith.

After Aquinas and Albo

Unlike Aristotle or Aquinas, modern moral philosophers do not believe that virtues are culturally or historically invariant. What counts as a virtue depends upon the cultural and historical milieu in which the

³⁴ Albo, *Sefer Ha-Ikkarim*, iv. 469–70.

counting is done. Some of the traits that Aristotle counts as virtuous, such as magnificence (which has to do with lavish displays of wealth), do not strike us as virtuous at all. Nor do items that he leaves out, such as kindness, fail to be virtuous in our culture. Virtues requisite to life in a democratic age, such as tolerance or the willingness to question authority, would be counted as vices in a non-democratic (say, martial or hierarchical) culture. Both Aristotle and Aquinas (and Albo to a lesser degree) make large claims about human nature and its proper ends. The status of these claims is far more controversial in our time than in their times. In ancient Greece, of course, there was robust debate about the ends that define a happy or well-lived life, as well as the means that conduce to the achievement of those ends. Reading almost any Platonic dialogue reveals a range of conflicting positions on these questions. None the less, participants in the dialogue thought that the questions had real answers; moderns are much less certain. Moderns are not at all certain that the questions are even meaningful. It may just be that there are indefinitely many versions of virtue. (Thus, a liberal state, in Rawls' canonical account, must remain aloof from implementing any one substantive conception of the good life.) Perhaps the most fundamental thing we can say is that all human beings divide character, actions, and themselves into the noble and the base, but what counts as noble and what counts as base depends on culture and varies within a broad range.³⁵ To inquire into virtue then is to inquire into culture not nature, as Aristotle and Aquinas thought. Such a frame of inquiry does not secure virtue against conventionalism or relativism.

Aristotle's account of the virtues, which intends to describe the means and ends of the good life for man qua man, does not include hope. Hope enters the picture and is counted as a virtue only when the concept of redemption or salvation and all the attendant notions of what God has promised in this regard are taken into account. Is hope then dependent upon some culturally specific religious beliefs? If an ancient or modern pagan were to dismiss these beliefs as fictions, fantasies, or illusions, would hope cease to be a virtue? Is it only the assertion of the truth of these relevant beliefs that makes sense out of a

³⁵ Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), ch. 2. This chapter remains a signal contribution to the analysis and critique of cultural relativism.

highly normative appraisal of hope and the bestowal upon it of the status of a virtue? Is it then the case that characterizing hope as a virtue requires that a certain philosophical or theological anthropology, anchored in the Bible regardless of its other sources, be taken as normative? Can hope be a virtue for those who do not share Aquinas's and Albo's confidence in the reality and the promises of God? Are there grounds for hope, for great hopes, in the absence of faith?

It is possible that there have always been hopeful people, as well as gloomy ones regardless of cultural context. (As a joke from Eastern Europe goes, 'The pessimist says "Things can't get any worse"; the optimist says, "Oh yes they can!";' Perhaps our Cro Magnon ancestors were disposed into such groups as they brooded around the campfire discussing the prospects for the next hunt.) But, to say that hope is a virtue is not to say anything about personality types. Whether there are always and everywhere optimists and pessimists by nature is irrelevant. To talk about virtue is to talk about choices and values, about decisions to be one kind of person rather than another based to some extent on reasons; it is to talk as well about webs of social relations, practices, and institutions that create the space in which communally situated individuals work out their lives. To talk about virtues is to believe, I think, that persons in other cultures, divided by space or time, can none the less discuss their reasons and choices with one another. Their particular versions of the good may differ but they can perhaps empathize with one another's intuitions about goodness.³⁶ This is to enter into the perennial 'conversation of mankind', to which Michael Oakeshott refers. That virtues are culturally dependent does not imply that they are hermetically sealed off from rational analysis or critique. Virtues form, in part, from rational reflection on human intercourse, deliberation, and self-criticism—so much so that Socrates, the originator of the philosophical analysis of the virtues, thought that they resolved into one: knowledge is the only virtue. To speak of the virtues is to imply that they are grounded on principles that we can articulate, defend, or reject. We do not find Aristotle's great-souled or magnificent man merely foreign or weird, we find him morally inappropriate. We can give reasons for why we might reject magnanimity, in an

³⁶ For a modern Platonist's meditations on the possibility of cross-cultural perception of the unity of the Good, see Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge, 2002), ch. 3.

Aristotelian sense, as a virtue. In a democratic age, we do not find traditional conceptions of honour, such as are employed in honour killings in the Middle East, merely different; we find them morally objectionable. We are able to enter into dialogue, often critical dialogue, with other cultures' catalogues of virtues and to take a rational stand on them. We need not be cowed by what Karl Popper called 'framework relativism'.³⁷ Dialogue may be difficult but it is not impossible. Different schemes of virtue and vice, of value and disvalue, are conversation starters, not conversation stoppers. We cannot achieve—nor should we desire to achieve—a moral view from nowhere. But we can achieve a view that while necessarily connected to a way of life is not closed in upon itself. Its proponents can challenge their own views and engage in conversation with the views of others.

A culture that were to lose traditions of biblical faith, such as the increasingly secular cultures of northern and western Europe, as well as growing numbers of secular people in the United States, need not look upon the culture of believers as wholly unintelligible. It may be the case that certain beliefs, despite the fact that those who believe in them can give what, to them, are adequate reasons, do remain simply incredible to outsiders. People whose faith leads them, for example, to read the prophetic portions of the Hebrew Scriptures as infallible predictions of the latest earthquake, war, or political upheaval, can give reasons for their manner of using the text. But, to anyone who believes that the biblical text ought not to be read in this manner, the reasons that they adduce, while intelligible, are entirely unpersuasive. They are moves in a game that should not be played. For some people, the discourses of faith as a whole, all the language games of all the religions, are of this type. They are games which should not be played as there are no good reasons for playing them.

Have such confident atheists really taken the trouble to speak with thoughtful religious people about what matters most to them? Many modern atheists seem to think that religions, whatever else they might be, are at their core a set of highly dubious metaphysical propositions. These propositions, typically concerning the existence of a personal God, the creation of the universe by a supernatural God, the direction of history by a moral providence, the miraculous creation of human life, etc., fail to meet the standards of evidence required of

³⁷ Karl Popper, *The Myth of the Framework* (London: Routledge, 1996).

well-grounded claims as to the nature of reality. They are mere wishful thinking, which is fuelled by psychological needs of all sorts and, for the Freudians among them, the darker the need, the better. Religious beliefs do not constitute knowledge, certainly not knowledge of the external world in any relevant sense. In so far as we have some knowledge of the external world that is better grounded, in comparison with religious beliefs, such as evolution, it is folly or worse to hold on to religious 'explanations' when scientific ones are available. Religious people, if they are not actually stupid, are at least perverse in their defiance of scientific truth or, to be less epistemological but no less brutal, are immature. They need comforting myths for they are too timid to accept the cold comfort of reality as it is.

There are no doubt many who inhabit a religious world every bit as crude as the ideal-typical atheist's caricature. In response to several centuries of assault upon religion as a truth-bearing discourse, some have dug in their heels and asserted a simplistic version of religious truth, a counter-truth to that of science. Lacking evidence to make a case, that is, to win a game whose rules have been set by someone else, they cannot really persuade, they can only shout more loudly. No one but the true believers takes them seriously. They create their own enclaves and man the epistemic, social and moral barricades to keep disconfirming influences at bay. There is no counter-truth in this sense, only counterfeit truth. But is this really the heart of a thoughtful believer's faith? Thoughtful believers do not see themselves in the stereotype of faith bruited by critics such as Richard Dawkins. Closer to the heart of thoughtful faith than any set of discrete propositions capable of being deployed so as to compete with scientific statements about the world are affirmations about the goodness, beauty, and ultimate significance of life. Among these are affirmations of hope, most fundamentally that we should rise to hope about the human prospect and forswear, as a seduction, the embrace of despair. We should not accept absurdity, meaninglessness, and resignation as the final word. Life, however harsh, unjust, and brutal it is—however little the world requites our love for it—is better met by a response of profound hope, implicit in which is also courage, prudence, perseverance, and the rest, than of abandonment to despair. That is at the heart of a biblical faith. Is that not something about which an atheist and a believer could have a fertile and mutually provocative conversation?

Were such a conversation to begin, the partners would interrogate their own convictions from the point of view of hope. Is the hope of the theist only a hope, so to speak, for personal gain in a heavenly afterlife? Is faith a deal cut according to the ancient principle of *do ut des*? I will believe if you will reward. Is religious hope only, when all the metaphors are scraped away, a selfish affair? For hope to be a virtue, it must partake of reason. The dialogue of hope drives the religious person to interrogate his or her own deepest convictions. What of the atheist? Does the secularist or atheist hope no less than the theist? If so, what is the basis of that hope? Perhaps, the only basis is habit, an unacknowledged legacy of a biblically informed, Jewish and Christian civilization. The habits of hope in a promised future linger even when belief in the divine promise fades. The sacred, like nature, abhors a vacuum. Secularists, except for a few rugged nihilists, are not content to view the world in a wholly disenchanted, resigned, or tragic way.³⁸ They infuse secular and immanent projects, such as politics, with great hopes. They praise those who agree that their objects of hope are vast and worthy. They criticize or shun those who are apathetic and disengaged, who cast doubt on their investment of hope in a party, in progress, in history, in the market. Secularists or atheists continue to proportion their lives to ideals they hope to attain and to find supreme meaning and virtuous conduct in that correlation. (In this sense, hope functions as a virtue for them despite the fact that theological belief has fallen away.) But, are such hopes grounded on the evidence of experience alone or on an interpretation of experience informed by a kind of faith? Surely, it is the latter. Experience is never self-interpreting.

The question then as to whether hope can be a virtue without the full complement of Aquinas's or Albo's theological views can be given a tentative answer. To the extent that our culture continues to value hope, to value the hopeful character, to shun succumbing to despair or glorying in absurdity as unworthy of serious men and women we continue, albeit tacitly, to count hope as a virtue. Whether we should do this is another and a more important question. For less interesting than the sheer fact of the endurance of our cultural habits is the question of whether we are justified in continuing them, especially

³⁸ See, e.g., Ernest Gellner, 'The Rubber Cage: Disenchantment with Disenchantment', *Culture, Identity, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) and Daniel Bell, *The Winding Passage* (Cambridge: Abt Books, 1980).

in the absence of beliefs that provided them with their protective atmosphere. To formulate the problem succinctly, if it is rational to hope, is it rational to hope without God? In a later chapter, we will look at some modern thinkers who do precisely this and who attempt to offer cogent justifications for it. Before we return to this question, however, there is other work to do.

Although human beings have most likely everywhere and always been prone to hope, hope as a fully normative force has not been cultivated in all cultures. Some have neglected or disparaged it. The biblical culture and its spiritual descendants in the west have cultivated the normativeness of hope to an unusual degree. The Greek and Hellenistic–Roman cultures, especially in their philosophical embodiments, have not. The deep tensions (i.e., with respect to hope) between these cultures, which have contributed to the unusual vitality of Western civilization, are the subject of the next chapter.

3

The Negation of Hope

Anyone who has ever faced the grim prospect of a deadly illness, or who has been close to someone who has, knows what we might call the anxiety of hope. One wants deeply to have hope, but one also knows that one does not want to lie to oneself, to delude oneself with false hope. One wants both hopefulness and truthfulness, a difficult balance. To hope under such circumstances is always therefore to risk. Anxiety is the emblem of risk.

The anxiety of hope accompanies the hopeful consciousness as a shadow, a dark zone inseparable from the light. It constantly doubts the validity of hope. It counsels acceptance of the deadly certitude of resignation. It declines the risk of hope, wishing to resolve the tension that hope entails. Anxiety wants nothing more than its own surcease, although this requires the end of hope. The doctors say that the cancer is incurable—should one cease to have hope? Is it the better part of wisdom to resign oneself to certain death? To have hope is to resist the cold, reductive comfort of certainty—as much certainty as is possible for us—for the risky, unresolved restlessness of expectation. It is to expose oneself to the next blow, to make oneself vulnerable to the next cruel disappointment. It is to stake oneself on mere possibility, often against long odds, as opposed to quietly accepting where all the evidence seems to lead. Shadow is too passive a metaphor for the anxiety of hope. Its restlessness and tension are more like the looming presence of death itself. For those who know that death is on the horizon, death becomes a constant companion. It supervenes on every thought, every waking moment. Yet, still one wants to hope. Where there is life, Cicero said, there is hope.¹

¹ The precise quotation is *dum anima est, spes esse dicitur*: 'there is said to be hope for a sick man while there is life'. See *Cicero's Letters to Atticus*, trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), 363 (Letter 177 (ix. x)). Cf. Eccles. 9: 4.

The desire to free oneself from the anxiety of hope, we might say, can lead to the rejection of hope both under specific circumstances, when one is persuaded that the situation is hopeless, and in general. The general, systematized rejection of hope finds expression in fatalism. Hope is seen as akin to delusion and perturbation; it throws the soul into a web of pernicious, self-caused illusions, which rob it of its peace, even the peace of death.

But is this fair? The beginnings of the account that I have just sketched assumes that hope is virtuous (or, at least, normative) and that the denigration of hope is vicious (or, at least, perverse). It hints that the abandonment of hope stems from anxiety, not from rational principle. Its milieu is psychology, not metaphysics. Such an account, embryonic though it is, is immediately prejudicial vis-à-vis a critical stance towards hope. Let us avoid such a loaded approach and allow the critique of hope—the view that hope is a vice—to argue its case.

In this chapter I shall consider some of the non-positive ways in which the Western tradition has depicted hope. We begin with a highly ambivalent and sometimes quite negative attitude towards hope in the Greek tradition and then look at repercussions of this ambivalence among certain modern philosophers. The ambivalent to negative appraisal of hope has rational coherence in a world of a certain kind: a world without the confidence inspired by the biblical narrative of a saving God. The return of that ‘pagan’ ambivalence in modernity accompanies the modernist challenge to traditional Jewish and Christian faith. The persistence of ambivalence or skepticism towards hope represents a durable option for a non-biblical ethos of resignation and realism, an enduring paganism as it were, in the midst of Jewish and Christian civilization.²

Ancients

Before philosophy, Greek poetry and tragedy had already cultivated ambivalence towards hope.³ A famous early expression of this ambivalence

² Perhaps the leading interpretation of modernity as a return to paganism is Peter Gay’s classic work, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, i. *The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967); ii. *The Science of Freedom* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969). It discusses the reappropriation of Greek and Roman antiquity and the ever-increasing estrangement from Christianity.

³ A thorough list of classical sources on hope (ἐλπίς, ἐλπίζω) is found in Gerhard Kittel (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand

is the story of Pandora in Hesiod's *Works and Days*. The poem laments the hard, demanding life that humans lead and traces the need for constant toil to a vindictive Zeus, who punishes men because Prometheus stole his primal fire and gave it to them. For this original sin, Zeus created an alluring evil, which will be 'close to men's hearts' as they self-destructively 'take delight in it'.⁴ That evil is woman. Men will be drawn to her and come to know 'the cruelty of desire and longings that wear out the body'. She was endowed with 'lies, and wheedling words of falsehood, and a treacherous nature'. As if this misogynistic nightmare would not suffice, all the gods gave Pandora gifts 'to be a sorrow to men who eat bread'. An especially cruel gift, given through a hoax by Zeus himself, was a great jar (the famed 'Pandora's box'), a repository for all the cares and sufferings that would afflict men. Pandora, of course, released them onto the world.

but the woman, with her hands lifting away the lid
 from the great jar,
 scattered its contents, and her design
 was sad troubles for mankind.
 Hope was the only spirit that stayed there
 in the unbreakable
 closure of the jar, under its rim,
 and could not fly forth
 abroad, for the lid of the great jar
 closed down first and contained her;

What is the status of hope in this myth? On the one hand, hope is not counted among the evils that Pandora loosed upon the world. Hope figures as an antidote to them. However, hope is unavailable; it is trapped in the jar. Hope is not real, effective, or present. It is distant, imagined, and feckless. One does and can hope, of course, but it will avail nothing. Its true force is unavailable. 'For the earth is full of evil things, and the sea is full of them. There are sicknesses that come to men by day, while in the night moving of themselves they haunt us,

Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing, 1964), ii (*A-H*). I have drawn a representative selection of references from the list.

⁴ All references to Hesiod are taken from *The Works and Days / Theogony / The Shield of Herakles*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 27-9. The Pandora myth is found in ll. 55-105.

bringing sorrow to mortals . . . So there is no way to avoid what Zeus has intended'.⁵ Hope may be a comfort but she is also a prisoner who cannot save herself or men.

Later in the poem, Hesiod castigates imprudent and lazy men who do not prepare in the warm months for the winter. He writes that they live on 'empty anticipation' and fill their minds with 'bad thoughts'. When men, who should be working and saving, indulge these empty dreams then 'that is not a good kind of hopefulness'.⁶ Thus, Hesiod implies that there is a good kind of hopefulness, presumably one that motivates men to take care for their futures. The common kind, however, is idle and misleading. It makes men forget the trials that are in store for them. This contrast of good hope and empty or foolish hope appears again in Plato.

That hope might stir us to prudent action rather than, all too commonly, induce passivity and disregard is also a theme in the poet Pindar. 'The better part of action always is to pay one's first attention to immediate affairs; for devious time weighs down on men and crimps the course of life; but freedom offers men a remedy for even this. A man should also nurture likely hope . . .' (Isthmian 8: 14 ff.).⁷ Here hope appears as an ally of action and attention to one's affairs. The dominant note in Pindar, however, is that hope is a distraction from coping with the hard realities of life: 'Zeus does not clarify for men his own designs; and yet we undertake imposing projects, intent on many tasks, and tie our hands with reckless hope, while foresight's springs are far from us. We ought to find the mean in hunting gains; manias for the unattainable bring cutting pains' (Nemean 11: 43 ff.).⁸

Here, hope is by nature reckless, at odds with foresight, inspiring mania and bringing pain in its wake. Hope draws us towards the extravagant, causing us to transgress our bounds and place. 'There is among us men a very stupid breed who think a better life can be attained; we lose our own in hunting it with empty hope' (Pythian 3: 21-3).⁹ It drowns us in misguided appraisals of the world. 'The hopes

⁵ Hesiod, *The Works and Days / Theogony / The Shield of Herakles*, 29-31.

⁶ *Ibid.* 77.

⁷ Roy Arthur Swanson (trans.), *Pindar's Odes* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs Merrill Co, 1974).

⁸ *Ibid.* 176.

⁹ *Ibid.* 75.

of men are storm swept as they sail the crests and drops of falsity's misleading sea' (Olympian 12: 6).¹⁰

The tension between foresight and hope, between a realistic and resigned view of the future and a delusional, manic one is thematic in tragedy. The hero or heroine declines the offer of hope. Hope would interfere with his or her heroic acceptance of fate. In Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, Prometheus gives the race of men fire and *techne*, the practical arts, by means of which they can ameliorate their condition. But, he also gave them a more subtle gift. He blinded them 'from foreseeing doom'. 'What cure did you discover for that sickness? I sowed in them blind hopes' (ll. 250–2).¹¹ Hope allows men to struggle against the inevitability of death. It allows them momentarily to forget that they will die. Prometheus removed, according to a parallel in Plato, the aboriginal human knowledge of the time of each person's death. Forgetting what was once certain, men are able to hope.¹²

The common run of men find relief from dread in hope, however blind it is, but Prometheus, whose name means 'foreknowledge' cannot afford to hope. Knowing how the destiny of men and gods will turn out, he has nothing to hope for or to fear, although those who behold him, chained to the rock by an angry Zeus, are full of fear and pity. The chorus, voicing the common human perspective, laments that Prometheus can have no hope—'It is a sweet thing to draw out a long, long life in cheerful hopes . . . but I shiver when I see you wasted with ten thousand pains'—but the chorus misses Prometheus' tragic grandeur.¹³ He neither fears nor hopes; he foresees his destiny and bows, although not without protest, to it. He knows that one day he will be delivered and Zeus will fall. He doesn't and needn't hope for this. He knows it. Where there is knowledge neither hope nor fear can have a place.

Hope is born in uncertainty and the dread that arises from uncertainty. Fire and technology allow us to cope with uncertainty, mitigate our dread and reach out in hope. But, for a godlike being who sees the future there is no hope, only grim and defiant resolve. In Sophocles' *Antigone*, the heroine also casts aside the hope that her destiny may be

¹⁰ Ibid. 49.

¹¹ David Grene and Richmond Lattimore, *The Complete Greek Tragedies: Aeschylus II* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991), 148.

¹² This interpretation follows the view of David Grene (ibid. 135).

¹³ Ibid. 159. Cf. Euripides, *Orestes*, 976–80.

changed. Unlike Prometheus, Antigone is not godlike and does not have certain knowledge of the future. She does have certainty about what is right, however, about what she must do. With matchless resolve she defies the law of the state to follow the higher law of the gods. Burying her brother against the command of her king, she knows full well what the consequences for her defiance of human law will be. With her rejection of the conventions of her city, the hope of the house of Oedipus dies: there will be no heirs to carry on the name of her father, the late king.

For now that hope of which the light had been spread above the last root of the house of Oedipus—that hope, in turn, is brought low—by the blood-stained dust due to the gods infernal, and by folly in speech, and frenzy in the heart. . . . And through the future, near and far, as through the past, shall this law hold good: Nothing that is vast enters into the life of mortals without a curse. For that hope whose wanderings are so wide is to many men a comfort, but to many a false lure of giddy desires; and the disappointment comes on one who knoweth nought till he burn his foot against the hot fire.¹⁴

Hope is one of the vast things, the things that wander widely, but it comes into our lives as a curse. Although it comforts many, its comforts come at the cost of uncontrolled desire that cannot help but suffer disappointment. Antigone accepts such disappointments—too mild a word to be sure for her bitter fate—as inevitable outcomes of our human condition. The laws of men and the laws of god, conflicts in the nature of justice itself, are inevitable. That one should follow a higher law cannot justify one's disobeying the law of the city, especially if one is a woman, whose very nature—so the city holds—is to obey the laws of men. One's only hope is to avoid this conflict, but that would be an avoidance of one's destiny. Antigone, like Prometheus, knows what destiny requires of her and accepts, again not without anguish, its decree. Although Antigone is not a prophet and does not have the certain foreknowledge of Prometheus, she none the less knows what she is born to do. Out of this certainty, no hope can arise.¹⁵

¹⁴ *The Complete Plays of Sophocles*, trans. Richard Claverhouse Jebb (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 131.

¹⁵ No hope, at least, for this world. Antigone does cherish the 'good hope that my coming [to Hades] will be welcome to my father, and pleasant to you, my mother, and welcome, brother, to you'. Antigone hopes that the conflict between duty to the city and duty to the infernal gods will be resolved upon her death in favour of the latter and that her father, mother, and brother will approve of her choice. Here, a final hope is contingent on

Greek historians, such as Thucydides, treat hope in a similar fashion. In Book V of the *Peloponnesian War*, the Athenians present the Spartan colony of Melos with a choice to submit to Athenian rule or to be destroyed. The Athenians vastly outnumber the Melians and believe that right, by which they mean the perennial human right of conquerors to exercise their superior power, is on their side. The Melians believe that, although they have links with Sparta, they are technically neutral and by right ought to be left alone. They believe that Athens is unjust in its designs and prefer to hope in the gods, whose interest in justice will ensure that they are not vanquished by Athens. The Melians explain why, despite the inequality of forces and the probability of their defeat, they will not accept the Athenians' offer of surrender: 'But we know that the fortune of war is sometimes more impartial than the disproportion of numbers might lead one to suppose; to submit is to give ourselves over to despair, while action still preserves for us a hope that we may stand erect.'¹⁶

Here hope is tied strongly to the possibility of action, of agency. Despair follows from the abandonment of agency. The Melians prefer the risk of action, and therefore of hope, to the certainty of despair, which is a consequence of resignation and submission. In the Athenian response, we find a damning indictment of the irrationality of the Melians' hope, indeed, of hope *per se*.

Hope, danger's comforter, may be indulged in by those who have abundant resources, if not without loss at all events without ruin; but its nature is to be extravagant, and those who go so far as to put their all upon the venture see it in its true colours only when they are ruined; but so long as the discovery would enable them to guard against it, it is never found wanting. Let this not be the case with you, who are weak and hang on a single turn of the scale; nor be like the vulgar, who, abandoning such security as human means may still afford, when visible hopes fail them in extremity, turn to invisible, to prophecies and oracles and other such inventions that delude men with hopes to their destruction.¹⁷

uncertainty. She has no uncertainty about the ultimacy of conflict in this world and hence no hope for this world. She does have uncertainty about her fate in the next world, however, and thus the possibility of hope.

¹⁶ Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. R. Crawley (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1948), 303 (V. 103).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

In this view, hope tends towards extravagance. Hope blinds men's eyes to an accurate appraisal of their condition. It induces them to spurn 'real world options', as we might say. Only in retrospect, after they are ruined, do they see how vain their hope was. But, even if they move towards a rational assessment of their condition, rather than discipline, curtail, or repudiate hope in the face of constrained possibilities they turn to ever more extravagant, supernatural hope—prophecies and oracles—which fully alienate them from realistic courses of action. The Melians reply that they are not as irrational as the Athenians think. They know that their forces are unequal to the 'power and fortune' of Athens, 'but we trust that the gods may grant us fortune as good as yours, since we are just men fighting against unjust . . .'¹⁸ They also believe, not entirely without reason, that Sparta will come to their aid. Departing from the negotiation, the Athenians assured the Melians that their hopes 'will be most completely deceived'. The Athenians were right. After a protracted campaign, and sedition within the Melian camp, the Melians surrendered to the Athenians, 'who put to death all the grown men whom they took, and sold the women and children for slaves, and subsequently sent out five hundred colonists and inhabited the place themselves'.¹⁹

Hope is characterized in these texts predominantly as anticipation or expectation. Indeed, the Greek word for hope, *elpis* (ἐλπίς), has the root meaning of expectation, which entails thought as much as, or more than, it entails feeling. The Greek construction of hope is not without emotional content but its main thrust is cognitive. Hope has to do with thought and opinion, which is tinged, however, by desire or fear. Humans naturally anticipate the future—'while there is life, there is hope' writes Euripides—projecting their thoughts, images, and desires on its yet unwritten page. Hope is, in a sense, neutral, a derivative of the capacity for thought as such. But hope as experienced by man in the midst of life is never neutral. Hope can be good (*euelpis*; εὐελπίς) or bad (*kake*; κακή) depending upon its object and its consequences.²⁰ When hope leads to 'energy, enterprise, daring, ingenuity, originality, and curiosity', as in the young man, Euelpides (literally,

¹⁸ Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. R. Crawley (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1948), 303 (V. 103).

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 306 (V. 116).

²⁰ For discussion and sources, see Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ii. 518.

Good Hope), who is one of the heroes of Aristophanes' *The Birds*, then it is a good.²¹ Hope can be good if it leads to action but, as we saw with the disastrous course of action undertaken by the Melians, activist hope can also lead to catastrophe. Hope cannot escape ambivalence.

Turning to philosophy, we find many of the same themes repeated in Plato and Aristotle. As philosophers, however, they treat hope in a more analytic mode than their literary predecessors. Unfortunately, neither Plato, nor Aristotle, nor the Stoics have any sustained treatment of hope. Hope is simply not a topic of significance comparable to friendship, statesmanship, or the moral life. References to hope, sometimes in the form of citations from the poets, are slipped into discussions that concern other matters such as discussions about true and false perceptions and judgements, illusions, or memory of the past and the anticipation of the future. Hope is often tied contextually to the illusionary. The rich discussions of virtue—the subtle analyses of emotion, disposition, thought, and action—that one finds in Plato and Aristotle, as well as in the Stoics, fail to engage the theme of hope in any robust way.

In the *Protagoras*, which argues for the unity of the virtues, Plato quotes the poet Simonides: 'Therefore never shall I seek for the impossible, cast away my life's lot on empty hope, a quixotic quest for a blameless man . . .'²² The context for this reference to the futility of hope is a teaching about the fragility of human goodness. One can both become and continue to be a bad man, for badness is a state of decay and we naturally, it seems, are prone to decay. We become bad as our goodness wanes under the assault of misfortune. Goodness is an achievement that can seldom be sustained. We cannot 'be' good, in the sense of abiding in goodness forever; we can only become good and try our best to persevere in it against the entropy of decay. In this sense, it is futile to hope to find a good man, as Simonides asserts in his ode. Is it by implication then futile to hope that any man or oneself may become good, for however brief a time? That does not follow. Plato assumes that persons can become good. They cannot sustain goodness, however. None the less, becoming good does not appear to be a worthy

²¹ Aristophanes, *Three Comedies*, trans. William Arrowsmith (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 3. On the natural hopefulness of the young, see Plato's *Protagoras* 328d.

²² *Protagoras* 345d, in John M. Cooper (ed.), *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishing Co, 1997), 776.

object of hope here. Goodness is something that one can (indeed, one must) work at. It is an achievement, however tentative. It does not happen to one; one earns it. It is otiose to hope for it.

In the *Philebus*, a dialogue on the nature of the best life, Socrates argues on behalf of the view that the best life consists neither simply of wisdom nor of pleasure but of a mixture of the two. His strategy is to convince his interlocutors that pleasure and knowledge are not opposed to or independent of one another but, in real life, occur in complex mixtures. Accordingly, pleasures are not simply affairs of the senses. No less than judgements, which are affairs of the mind, pleasures, Socrates argues (quite counter-intuitively) can be true or false. We can think that what we are experiencing is pleasant but can be quite mistaken about this, according to Socrates. In this context, Socrates paints a complex picture of man suspended between memories and expectations, prone to feelings of pain, such as hunger, and pleasure, such as the hope that food is on the way.²³

When a man hopes for the relief of hunger pains, he simultaneously experiences both pleasure (the intellectual expectation of relief from the pain of hunger) and pain (hunger per se). Hope comforts him, brings him pleasure mentally while his body is still racked physically with pain. Hope or expectation (Plato uses both *elpis* and a word that means 'expectation' in a more narrow sense—*prosdokia*²⁴) are always future-oriented. Hope is inconceivable, however, without the past, without the recollection of the past—in this case the memory of what it is to be filled with food. Expectation takes shape in both judgements about past states and images drawn from past sense perceptions that continue to linger in the soul. Plato analogizes mental activities to those of a scribe and a painter, that is, a writer of judgements and a producer of pictures, who furnish the mind (*psyche*) with the raw material for framing expectations. Hope or expectations are constants for us. Human beings are 'forever brimful of hopes . . . always full of many hopes'.²⁵

Plato now adds another layer to the argument. In good persons, the hopeful images and the evaluative judgements about them will be of

²³ *Philebus* 36a–b.

²⁴ See *Philebus* 36d: 'How in that case can fears be true or false, or expectations (*prosdokiai*) or judgments?'

²⁵ *Philebus* 39e.

good things; in bad persons, they will be of bad, ignoble things. Good men then can be said to hope for true pleasures; the wicked hope for bad or false pleasures. Neither of these types of pleasure actually exists in the present; they are mere hopes. But there is none the less a cognitive or rational dimension to them and consequently to expectation or hope per se. For, in the act of hoping, the good make good judgements and the wicked make wicked ones. Future states of affairs, it now appears, are as much subject to correct and incorrect evaluative judgements as are past or present ones.²⁶

In *Laws*, we gain slightly more insight into the relation of hope to cognition. There Plato, in praise of self-control as a criterion of goodness, refers to pleasure and pain as ‘a pair of witless and mutually antagonistic advisors’, each contending for control over the soul. In addition to these, there are ‘opinions about the future whose general name is “expectations” (*elpis*). Specifically, the anticipation (*elpis*) of pain is called “fear”, and the anticipation (*elpis*) of the opposite is called “confidence”’.²⁷ *Elpis* is used here in a neutral sense. As no one (a masochist?) hopes for pain, it makes no sense to translate the first use of *elpis* as hope; the second use could be so translated, however. Thus, expectation, anticipation, or hope has cognitive and emotive dimensions; it is a species of opinion (*doxa*; *δόξα*) which can lead either to fear or confidence. Opinion for Plato, of course, is not yet knowledge or science (*episteme*). Thus, in the next sentence he contrasts expectant or hopeful opinion with calculation (*logismos*; *λογισμός*). It is ‘calculation, by which we judge the relative merits of pleasure and pain, and when this is expressed as a public decision of a state, it receives the title “law”’.²⁸ That form of opinion that constitutes expectation or hope is less veracious than the evaluative reasoning that weighs merits and, in its public form, constitutes the essence of law. As one commentator

²⁶ This would be an important insight into the cognitive status of hope were it not based, arguably, on a logical confusion. Plato may have arrived at this assertion by conflating moral judgement—after all, we can say that ignoble pleasures are ‘false’ in the future in just the same sense that they are ‘false’ or morally unworthy in the present—with factual judgement as to whether a given state of affairs is the case. For the puzzles attendant on Plato’s defence of the idea that truth and falsity apply to pleasures in other than a moralistic sense, see J. C. B. Gosling (ed.), *Philebus*, Clarendon Plato Series (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 108 ff.

²⁷ Plato, *The Laws*, ed. E. B. England, 2 vols. (Manchester: University Press, 1921), i. 644d.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

puts it, 'he means that what this calculation (about the advisability of encouraging hopes or fears) is to the individual man, that, in the case of the state, is the debate which results, by public agreement, in a law'.²⁹

On balance, hope for Plato can be said to be a type of opinion directed towards the future, which is based on past judgements and images, and which gives rise to feelings, strictly speaking to the feeling of confidence. It is in this sense that Socrates says, at the end of the *Apology*:

You too must be of good hope (*euepidas*) as regards death, gentlemen of the jury, and keep this one truth in mind, that a good man cannot be harmed either in life or in death, and that his affairs are not neglected by the gods. What has happened to me now has not happened of itself, but it is clear to me that it was better for me to die now and to escape from trouble. That is why my divine sign did not oppose me at any point. So I am certainly not angry with those who convicted me, or with my accusers. . . . Now the hour to part has come. I go to die, you go to live. Which of us goes to the better lot is known to no one, except the god.³⁰

Socrates had earlier reasoned that 'there is good hope that death is a blessing' for it is either nothing, a dreamless eternal sleep, or it is a transport to another form of existence where one could keep company with the heroes and wise men of the past. In either case, one can feel confident about the future. If one has no fear of death, one has nothing whatsoever to fear. (Similarly, in the *Republic* (387–8), Plato counsels that the guardians must be raised without the fear of death. The poetry of the ancients, which depicts Hades as something fearful, must be censored. The guardians must think of themselves as self-sufficient, their lives anchored in their own consummate virtue, unaffected by loss and undisturbed by expectation.)

The good hope of Socrates, who is soon to spurn the offer of escape and to take his own life, is as close as Plato comes to a positive appraisal of hope. It also strikes a note congenial to Jewish or Christian readers, although one would not want to press the similarity between the Socratic hope for death and the Jewish and Christian hope for eternal life in the divine presence too far. For the Jewish and Christian hope is a hope in the justice and love of God; the Socratic hope is a confidence

²⁹ Plato, *The Laws*, ed. E. B. England, 2 vols. (Manchester: University Press, 1921), 255.

³⁰ *Apology* 41d (cited *Complete Works*, 36).

in the impassability (*ataraxia*) of the wise and self-sufficient man, who will not shudder before the mystery of death. Jews and Christians hope despite, not for, death. Their shared hope is that death is more of a beginning than an end. For Socrates and, as we shall see, for Stoics such as Seneca, death is a blessed end that can be hastened by suicide if need be.

Aristotle departs from Plato in significant ways. He rejects Plato's principle of the unity of the virtues, as well as Plato's repudiation of the worth of contingent goods such as love and friendship. An Aristotelian would not be ashamed to fear death, pity the victim of injustice, or feel anger towards Socrates' accusers. Here we encounter a morality that strikes us as more livable, more realistic, more like our own. Aristotle's treatment of hope, while working within the same general framework, is therefore somewhat more positive than Plato's. As to the general framework, the relation between memory and expectation, past and future, knowledge and imagination remains central to the discussion.

A good place to begin is an oft quoted statement of Aristotle on hope, which is not to be found, however, in his own surviving works but in the biography of him by the ancient philosophical biographer, Diogenes Laertius. 'He was asked to define hope, and he replied, "It is a waking dream".'³¹ To understand what Aristotle means by this, let us consider his teaching on dreams *per se*.

Just as when one throws a projectile, the projectile keeps flying after the motion of one's arm has ceased, so too do the stimulations of the sense organs and the representations of external objects produced in them endure after the objects are no longer present. Dreams are the inertia of perceptual stimulation and intellectual representation in the absence of actual objects. These inertial effects are constant but we do not notice them in a waking state because the clamour of ongoing perception drowns out the residual effects of earlier perceptions. Aristotle likens this to the presence of a large fire distracting our consciousness from the presence of a small one. By night, however, when we sleep, the flow of perception diminishes along with the diminution of the intellectual faculty, by which we distinguish and judge perceptions. Now, the inertial or residual perceptions, no longer inhibited by the active employment of the senses or the intellectual

³¹ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. R. D. Hicks, 2 vols. (London: William Heinemann, 1925), i. 461 (bk V, ch. 1: 18).

discernment of the 'deciding faculty' in its judgements upon them, run riot. Such is the stuff of dreams.

An additional dimension is provided by the emotions. Just as emotionality (for example, anger or fear) distorts our waking perception, so too in dreams: our dream 'perceptions' are coloured by our emotional states. Fearful persons, in a waking state, might perceive an approaching man as an enemy, even though he is in actuality a friend. So too in dreams, the flow of images is shaped by the movement of emotions in the dreamer. Dreams are illusions, which result from the inhibition of reason.³² Although Aristotle does not reject out of hand the popular view that dreams contain, qua prophecies, knowledge of future events, he is clearly sceptical of such claims and tries to delimit the range of cases in which such a conclusion might be plausible.³³

Since Aristotle explicitly distinguishes delirium and illusion in a waking state from dreams *per se*, it is hard to say exactly what he means by 'waking dream'. Perhaps he was merely being clever. At any rate, the association of hope with dreams is not a credit to the former. Hope, like dreams, entails a diminution of reason and an expansion of passion. Hope is to the day what dreams are to the night: 'the sense perceptions are in a state of freedom.'³⁴ Reason, to paraphrase Wittgenstein, has gone on holiday.

This ambivalent to negative characterization of hope is supported by Aristotle's discussion of character in the *Rhetoric*. There, he contrasts the character traits of young men and old men, and then contrasts both of these with the mean, the character of the middle-aged. It is clear that both youth and age suffer from the effects of extremes. One of these extremes is hope: youth have too much of it; the aged have very little. Youth, Aristotle tells us, are 'passionate, hot-tempered, and carried away by impulse, and unable to control their passion'.³⁵ They put honour and the craving for victory ahead of money. They are not 'ill-natured but simple-natured because they have never yet witnessed much depravity; confiding, because they have as yet not been often

³² 'On Dreams', 458b–462b in Richard McKeon (ed.), *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 1941), 618–25. (Cf. 'On the Soul' (De Anima), bk III, ch. 3 on imagination (*phantasia*)).

³³ See 'On Propheying by Dreams', *ibid.* 626–30.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 625.

³⁵ Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, trans. John Henry Freese (London: William Heinemann, 1926), 247 (bk II, ch. 12: 5).

deceived; full of hope (*euepides*), for they are naturally as hot blooded as those who are drunken with wine, and besides they have not yet experienced many failures'.³⁶ Here hope is a function of both hot-headedness, akin to intoxication, and naivety. The lack of experience in youth allows a hopeful orientation to dominate them.

For the most part they live in hope, for hope is concerned with the future as memory is with the past. For the young the future is long, the past short; for in the morning of life it is not possible for them to remember anything, but they have everything to hope; which makes them easy to deceive, for they readily hope.³⁷

Hope sounds at first like an idyllic state but then a jarring note intrudes. Youth are easy to take advantage of, to fool, for they tend to construe the future in a rosy way and are insufficiently wary and prudent. Hope makes them credulous. In the sequel, however, Aristotle retreats from his negative evaluation and praises hope as an ally of a principal virtue, courage. 'And they are more courageous, for they are full of passion and hope, and the former of these prevents them from fearing, while the latter inspires them with confidence, for no one fears when angry, and hope of some advantage inspires confidence.'³⁸ Here, hope and passion can be channelled to a moral purpose; they can be allied with the moral excellence represented by virtue. Hope, furthermore, supports the high-mindedness of youth, what we might call their idealism, 'for they have not yet been humbled by life nor have they experienced the force of necessity . . . there is a high-mindedness in thinking oneself worthy of great things, a feeling which belongs to one who is full of hope'.³⁹ The Aristotelian virtue of high-mindedness (*megalopsychia*) is sustained by the hopeful disposition of youth. The tie of hope to the exercise of two virtues, courage and high-mindedness, adds a positive dimension to Aristotle's portrayal. None the less, in his concluding comments about youth, it is clear that Aristotle's judgement on them, while not harsh, is quite critical, if only in an avuncular way: 'for they do everything to excess—love, hate, and everything else. And they think they know everything, and confidently affirm it, and this is the cause of their excess in everything'.⁴⁰ Thus, the confidence that hope inspires also leads to morally defective actions and dispositions.

³⁶ Ibid. 249.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Yet the same is true in an obverse way for the aged, who, lacking hope, have their own vices such as ‘littleness of mind’ and, owing to a deficit of confidence, cowardliness. While youth live for the noble, the aged live for the petty—the merely useful. While youth, borne by hope, give themselves to great causes, the aged, in their timorousness, are prone to the small and selfish.

And they are rather shameless than modest; for since they do not care for the noble so much as for the useful, they pay little attention to what people think. And they are little given to hope owing to their experience, for things that happen are mostly bad and at all events generally turn out for the worse, and also owing to their cowardice. They live in memory rather than in hope; for the life that remains to them is short, but that which is past is long, and hope belongs to the future, memory to the past.⁴¹

Aristotle could almost be read as sanctioning the hopelessness of the old, for it is a fruit of hard-won experience. Things that happen are mostly bad. But the relation of hopelessness to cowardice is troubling. Cowardice is certainly a vice. Here we have a good indication of an ambivalent assessment of hope. One needs it as an ally of virtue; without it, one cannot live well. On the other hand, it traffics in illusion, easily runs to excess, and encourages distortions in character and thinking.

It is perhaps for this reason that, when Aristotle turns to describing the character of those in the ‘prime of life’ he does not mention hope at all. When one achieves a golden mean, neither rash nor fearful, neither too trusting nor too distrusting, neither prodigal nor parsimonious, full of self-control vis-à-vis one’s passion and desire and capable of ‘judging rather in accordance with the actual facts’, there is no need for hope.⁴² One lives, it seems, in a stable present, neither drawn to the future nor dwelling in the past. One practises virtue and finds balance in all pursuits.

In Stoicism, the most widespread and influential philosophy of the Greco-Roman world, we find a complex, long-lived movement that picks up on some Platonic themes while rejecting or, at least initially, ignoring Aristotelian teachings.⁴³ As in Plato’s *Republic*, Stoic teachers

⁴¹ Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, trans. John Henry Freese (London: William Heinemann, 1926), 247 (bk II, ch. 12: 5). 253.

⁴² *Ibid.* 255.

⁴³ F. H. Sandbach, *The Stoics* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1994), 22. But cf. Andrew Erskine, *The Hellenistic Stoa: Political Thought and Action* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 18. Erskine finds Aristotle an influence on Zeno, the founder of the school.

stress the self-sufficiency of the virtuous man or woman. (They repudiated conventional gender distinctions and believed that all human beings, in sharp contrast to all animals, were capable of reason and shared thereby citizenship in the cosmos not only with one another but with the gods.) The virtuous person requires nothing external and cannot be damaged or harmed by external misfortune. The Stoics are more radical than other ancient schools in their complete rejection of the worth of external goods. Indeed, in their view it is mistaken to call anything other than virtue good. The only good is moral good; most things that convention calls good are at best indifferent. Morally indifferent matters (*adiaphora*), such as wealth, health, leisure, etc., may be ranked and some may be preferred to others but, strictly speaking, they are irrelevant to virtue and therefore to happiness. Right reason understands that only virtue is good in itself and both necessary and sufficient for the life of *eudaimonia*. No external, contingent state of affairs is relevant to the attainment of virtue, which, when one achieves it, confers imperturbability (*apatheia*) on the wise man. 'If poverty is an evil, no beggar can be happy, be he as wise as you like. But Zeno dared to say that a wise beggar was not only happy but also wealthy'.⁴⁴

The passions must be extirpated by rational self-therapy such that one could emulate the sage, who, Cicero tells us, upon hearing that his child had died, was able to say 'I was already aware that I had begotten a mortal'.⁴⁵ Extirpation of passion does not mean that one no longer has feelings. Rather, it means that one assesses ones feelings properly; that one does not let feeling swell to excess—the Stoic sense of passion—and overwhelm one. An animal reacts immediately to a sensation with action. A human being, by contrast, is capable of assessing sensation and assenting to the judgement that rises from sensation. A dog, for example, sees a rabbit and immediately springs after it. A person sees a rabbit and judges whether to hunt it or not.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ In the standard compilation of Stoic writings, J. von Arnim, *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta* (SVF), 4 vols. (Leipzig, 1903–24), i. 220. Cited here in Jason L. Saunders, *Greek and Roman Philosophy after Aristotle* (New York: Free Press, 1966), 131.

⁴⁵ Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 3. 30. The story is quoted in Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 363. My discussion of Stoic ethics is indebted to Nussbaum's treatment.

⁴⁶ Sandbach, *The Stoics*, 60.

In principle, every sensation, every feeling to which sensation gives rise, is patient of rational assessment. This is the way of human and divine nature—a steady, consistent rational evaluation of experience, never a passionate, irrational response. Among the passions which defeat a life according to reason is *epithymia*, ‘yearning after a thing’, longing or desire.⁴⁷ We may take this to be hope for something strongly desired to occur. But such longing is invariably mistaken, as it confuses the desired object, which is morally indifferent, with something that is morally good. Similarly, with the passion of fear, something that is strongly dreaded merely confuses that which is morally indifferent (e.g. death, dishonour, poverty) with something that is morally bad. There is need for neither hope nor fear. The cultivation of detachment from the passions to such a radical degree undermines the possibility of hope. If one fears, desires, or needs nothing, what could one hope for?

The idea of radical detachment from emotion and its corollary, virtuous self-sufficiency, should not be taken to mean that Stoics counselled withdrawal from society. This is emphatically not the case. ‘Since we see that man is designed by nature to safeguard and protect his fellows, it follows from this natural disposition, that the Wise Man should desire to engage politics and government, and also to live in accordance with nature by taking to himself a wife and desiring to have children with her.’⁴⁸ Man is not, by nature, apolitical or asocial. Stoicism envisioned a cosmic state in which all humans lived in harmony with each other, and with the gods; where justice prevailed because all lived according to nature and nature’s law.⁴⁹ Is there then a tension in Stoicism between the affection that nature has placed within us for our friends or our city and the demand for the extirpation of passion in order to achieve virtue and wisdom? Not necessarily. Our task is to take the natural concern for those close to us and transform it into a concern for all who are like us, that is, all who are human and who live in the cosmic polity. We have to raise our given nature to a higher nature; to see our particular good against the background of a

⁴⁷ Sandbach, *The Stoics*, 61.

⁴⁸ SVF iii. 616 in Saunders, *Greek and Roman Philosophy*, 132.

⁴⁹ SVF iii. 333, 340, 342 (ibid. 125–6). For a brief but rich discussion of Stoic political theory, based on the available sources, see the anthology by A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, i, *Translations of the Principle Sources with Philosophical Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 434–6.

cosmic good. This entails assessing all human beings as having the same worth. We ought not to be closer to our friends than to strangers; there can be no strangers in a moral sense from this perspective.⁵⁰ Accordingly, where reason prevails, the natural sentiment of affection should be enlarged into the rational, which is also to say, natural principle of universal concern. To live according to nature is to live according to the highest nature, which is reason. Stoic detachment towards contingent particulars becomes Stoic engagement with the universalistic ethical rationality of the cosmopolis.

But is not this a kind of utopian hope, the Enlightenment era echo of which is Kant's Kingdom of Ends? Could one not say that Stoicism embodies a hope for a more humane or more divine—the divine residing in our rational souls—future? Does Stoicism not propose a politics? Among the lost books of the founder of the movement, Zeno, was a *Republic*, which sketched what a society of the wise, based wholly on life according to nature, would be like.⁵¹ Such an ideal society was perhaps intended more as a standard against which extant societies could be judged rather than as a proposal for the transformation of society. Wise men need not rule (*pace* Plato) nor ought they to coerce others. They should set an example: the transformation of the individual through the rational mastery of the passions could ameliorate society and state as a consequence of the transformation of citizens. More actively, the wise man may help educate citizens about their common good.⁵² Even though no existing regime is good and that, in principle, one can live a virtuous life under any form of regime a wise man should participate in a polity that is making progress towards the good and seek to improve it.

Citizens who properly perceive that they have been fitted by nature 'to form unions, societies, and states' will expect that the laws of individual cities and states conform to the law of nature to the greatest extent possible.⁵³ Such a law aims at the common good and mitigates the tendency towards excessive self-regard. The extent of Stoic political aspiration is unclear. Perhaps it is best to view Stoicism not as an active commitment to social or political reform but primarily as a way of wisdom with political consequences. Whatever its initial potential

⁵⁰ Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, 342–4.

⁵¹ Erskine, *The Hellenistic Stoa*, 23.

⁵² Cf. *ibid.* 64–74.

⁵³ SVF iii. 369 in Saunders, *Greek and Roman Philosophy*, 127.

for political reformism or radicalism might have been, in the Roman Empire Stoicism took a conservative attitude towards existing institutions. It identified the ethical rationality requisite to the cosmopolis with duty to the institutions of state and society in one's local world. Given its dominant logic of detachment, Stoicism became a force for political quietism.

Detachment and quietism found their metaphysical expression in a soft version of determinism. The Stoics believed that the universe was governed by a strict regime of causation, extending back into the cosmogony. Unlike the Aristotelians, the Stoics rejected a first cause, an unmoved mover, which stands outside of the order of change. The cosmos—God—is a continual recurrence of order and conflagration. All of the motions within it have causes. If one were, like God, sufficiently wise, one would know the cause of every event. One would be able to state that *x* is the cause of *y*. A perfectly wise person would have no opinions but would rather be able to speak the truth—to utter true propositions—at all times. ('They say that the Wise Man will never form mere opinions, that is to say, he will never give assent to anything that is false.'⁵⁴) This holds for both the past and the future. In principle, the wise man need not hope for or expect anything to occur; he already knows, if he knows causation well, what will occur.⁵⁵ An anxious or expectant attitude towards the future is thus not only incompatible with Stoic ethics, it also violates Stoic metaphysics. Our attitudes towards the future are based on ignorance and emotional perturbation. If we were capable of a strictly rational view, a God's eye view, we would see that the conditions which govern the future already exist as efficient causes in the present. Our task is to discern and accept them.

It is hard, if not impossible, to square such determinism with the Stoic project of self-perfection in virtue through the disciplined extirpation of the passions. Can one act against necessity if all is predetermined? A typical ancient argument against the Stoics on this score was the so-called lazy argument or argument for inaction. 'If all things are determined,' writes Cicero, 'why go to a doctor for your health?

⁵⁴ SVF iii. 549 (ibid. 131).

⁵⁵ Sandbach, *The Stoics*, 44. His knowledge also includes the presupposition, according to Seneca, 'that something can intervene to prevent his design'. 'The wise man', therefore 'comes to everything with the proviso "if nothing happens to prevent it"'.

If everything is determined by fate, then nothing is possible'.⁵⁶ If you are fated to get better, whether you call in a physician or not is irrelevant to your prognosis. If you are fated to get worse, there is also no reason to call a doctor. Thus, in either case, one shouldn't call a doctor. Most people would find this a very unsatisfactory conclusion.

To avoid this conclusion and preserve some shred of human responsibility for *to eph' hēmin*, 'what depends on us', the Stoics introduced a distinction between two types of causes. They distinguished between 'perfect and principal' causes and 'auxiliary and proximate' ones. They also distinguished between fate and necessity, retaining one while trying to weaken the grip of the other. They sought to retain the overall governance of 'fate' without the ineluctability of 'necessity'. To say that everything happens according to fate is to point to auxiliary and proximate causes—causes that are effective but might have been otherwise. I may have a weak constitution and am thereby naturally (i.e., necessarily) prone to sickness, but I made things worse by exposing myself to persons with contagious diseases. My constitution is a 'perfect and principal' cause over which I have no control but my decision to go to the Forum during an epidemic is an 'auxiliary and proximate' cause over which I had control. My decision to go, no less than my physical constitution, has causes. But they are different orders of causes. One is entirely determined by external factors. The other is determined by internal factors. The former is called 'necessity', the latter 'fate'. Against the lazy argument cited above, the Stoic would argue that the patient may indeed be fated to recover but his recovery hinges on being treated by a physician. In order to fulfil destiny, he has to *do* something. In order to fulfil the designs of fate, he is fated to call a physician.

In this way, the Stoics sought to preserve some small margin of control over 'what depends on us' such that we could, without logical contradiction, struggle for perfection in a causally determined universe. As ancient critics such as Alexander of Aphrodisias argued, however, the Stoic solution is enmeshed in self-contradiction. For the internal factors making for my decision in the examples above to go to the Forum or to call a physician are no less predetermined than the external

⁵⁶ SVF ii. 956 in Saunders, *Greek and Roman Philosophy*, 106. Cf. R. W. Sharples (trans.), *Alexander of Aphrodisias on Fate* (London: Duckworth, 1983), 8–11.

ones. Although it is true that the outcome that fate has predetermined requires my agency to reach the predetermined result, my agency is no less fated—or to abandon the artificial Stoic distinction—no less necessitated than other causal factors. In this sense, the distinction between types of causation is merely technical; the distinction between Stoicism's 'soft determinism' and more rigorous, hard determinisms is a distinction without a difference.⁵⁷

If all is pre-determined by an infinite causal regress, if individual agency, while a factor, is not real agency in the sense that genuine agency requires freedom, then the best one can do is accept the dictates of fate. A wise man can see them coming. Stoic metaphysics was led by Stoic logic. Of any future state of affairs, one could utter either an affirmative or a negative statement in the present (e.g., 'it will rain tomorrow' or 'it will not rain tomorrow'). In Stoic logic, one of these must be true, the other false. The true one is true with the same necessity as any true statement about the past or present is true. Thus, it is necessarily the case that either it will rain tomorrow or it will not rain tomorrow. The future is already determined, and necessarily so, by one of these alternatives. Were one to have a God's eye view, one would know which one of these it is. The Stoic sage, who lives according to nature and whose reason is as fully divine as is possible, will come close. In any case, our relative ignorance with respect to which proposition is true does not change the logical situation: one of them is true; the future is predetermined. This problem, which Aristotle enunciated and sought to solve in a manner that preserved genuine human agency and contingency, preoccupied the Stoics and delimited the horizon of their moral outlook.⁵⁸ We will see its reappearance among moderns, such as Spinoza.

This sovereignty of fate is, for the Stoics, the sovereignty of God. 'Lead me, Zeus and Destiny', says Epictetus. Fate is Zeus or the mind of Zeus. Fate is Providence.⁵⁹ Everything evil that occurs can be justified by either an instrumental purpose (the biting of the bedbugs

⁵⁷ A defence of the cogency of the Stoic distinction may be found in John M. Rist, *Stoic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 112–32.

⁵⁸ Aristotle articulates the problem, and the rather obscure solution, in bk. IX of *On Interpretation* (*de interpretatione*).

⁵⁹ Rist, *Stoic Philosophy*, 126–7. See also Long and Sedley, *Hellenistic Philosophers*, i. 274–7.

spur me to awaken early and eschew indolence) or by redefinition: that which convention calls evil is not truly evil in so far as it is irrelevant to virtue. A cosmic theodicy informs the entire Stoic project. That which exists is meant to be and, indeed, will recur infinitely. Fate is the will of God, the will of a God who does not save but who condemns to fate, to eternal recurrence in a universal death and rebirth.⁶⁰

As in Socrates' parting speech in the *Apology*, death must be met with equanimity. The Stoics, no less than their modern successors in the death with dignity movement, welcomed death, even by one's own hand. Suicide afforded one a margin of agency in the face of fate. All are fated to die. To choose the hour and manner of one's death both demonstrates the virtue of courage and inserts the possibility of 'what depends on us' into inexorability. Seneca, praising suicide, writes:

Some life brings speedily to the bourn they were bound to reach even if they tarried, others it torments and frets. Such a life, as you know, it is not always advisable to hold on to. Living is not the good, but living well. The wise man therefore lives as long as he should, not as long as he can. He will observe where he is to live, with whom, how, and what he is to do. He will always think of life in terms of quality, not quantity. If he encounters many vexations which disturb his tranquility, he will release himself. He will do this not only in an extreme exigency, but as soon as he begins to suspect Fortune he will look about him carefully to determine whether he ought to have done. He will consider it of no importance whether he causes his end or merely accepts it, whether late or early. He does not shrink as before some great deprivation, for not much can be lost from a trickle. Dying early or late is of no relevance, dying well or ill is. To die well is to escape the danger of living ill. That is why I regard the familiar Rhodian's dictum as most unmanly. A tyrant had thrown him into a dungeon where he was fed like some wild beast, and when someone urged him to starve himself, he said: 'While there is life, there is hope'. Even if this is true, life is not to be bought at all costs. However splendid a thing may be, however certain its acquisition, I will not come at it by acknowledging my lack of character.⁶¹

The quality of life, which is not to be confused with its current meaning of ease and comfort, but rather indicating self-control and virtuous action, is determinative. Where one can no longer live a morally good life, on the Stoic account, one is duty bound to end

⁶⁰ Long and Sedley, *Hellenistic Philosophers*, i. 308–10.

⁶¹ Moses Hadas (ed.), *The Stoic Philosophy of Seneca: Essays and Letters* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1958), 202–3.

one's life. A good, self-inflicted death compensates for a life no longer capable of moral excellence. This too is the will of God. The Stoic God, however, promises no life beyond the grave, no recompense for the struggle of the virtuous life, no satisfaction at the punishment of the wicked, no blessing on the life well lived. The distant thought of an eternal recurrence brings no comfort. Life is its own blessing; it is all that is. The austere morality of Stoicism promises no otherworldly compensation or reward, only repetition. One attains virtue for its own sake and finds happiness in the here and now. If one is broken by life and fails to achieve happiness that is one's own fault. Nothing more remains. To hope is to waste one's time.

Moderns

The New Philosophy of the seventeenth century, represented by men such as Descartes, Spinoza, and Hobbes, was much concerned with an analysis of the passions, among which figured hope. Hope had been elevated by the heritage of the Bible and the faith of Christianity into a virtue. But would a new, post-Scholastic philosophy much impressed by advances in natural science maintain an elevated image of hope? Or would hope revert to the ambivalent status it held in pagan antiquity? While trying to free themselves from the legacy of Aristotle and his Christian interpreters, the new philosophers rediscovered other ancient paths, such as Stoicism. Although the aim was to break from classical thought altogether and found a new science of morals solidly grounded on nature, elements of the Greek tradition none the less returned. The force of this return was to lead once again to a suspicious or dismissive attitude towards hope.

Mention has already been made, in Chapter 1, of such modern founders as Descartes, Hobbes, and Spinoza. For our purposes, Spinoza is the most interesting figure of the three, as his treatment of hope is the richest. I focus first on his teaching and then proceed to two post-Enlightenment successors, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. The latter belong to the tradition of cultural pessimism. Spinoza certainly does not. None the less, in all three, a remarkably negative view of hope prevails.

Spinoza

Spinoza aims in the *Ethics* to teach us how to live well, how to attain happiness in the present life. After arguing, in his famous (or infamous) geometrical manner for a monistic metaphysics that erases (or, more accurately, radically reconfigures) the distinction between God and the world and for a monistic anthropology that erases the distinction between the mind and the body, Spinoza turns to an account of the emotions. Spinoza is committed to a thoroughgoing naturalism in which human beings are no longer understood to be a 'kingdom within a kingdom'.⁶² Human beings, as is true of all other beings, are considered individuations or 'modes' of the single universal substance (1p16), known as 'God, or Nature' (1p29ds). As modes of the single substance, human beings cannot, on principle, be subject to a different kind of lawfulness from the other items in the universe. All must exhibit the same lawfulness, deriving from their status as expressions of the same underlying substance. Spinoza thus rejects the view that the emotions are outside of nature and the science of nature. He calls for a naturalistic psychology.⁶³ This further entails the rejection of the view that man's true nature, in a normative sense, is rational and that the human task is to master the irrational and therefore unnatural emotions with the aid of reason. Spinoza breaks with the classical tradition and with Descartes here. As a monist, he cannot fundamentally divide mind from body, such that the emotions could be relegated to the body and the mind be given the exalted role of controlling and ordering the eruptions of a lower, unruly realm. Emotions will have to exhibit a relevant logic. His treatise aims to show that emotions can be understood scientifically, indeed, geometrically, in so far as they follow

⁶² Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishing, 1992), 102. Henceforth, I will use a technical citation style with in-line references. There are a number of different styles of citation for the *Ethics* in use. I will use the style adopted by Don Garrett (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. xii–xiii. The Arabic number designates the part of the book (Pts I–V), 'p' = Proposition, 'd' = demonstration, 's' = scholium (i.e. note), 'da' = definition of the affects. See appendix to *Ethics*, pt 3. Thus, '3p18,s2' denotes *Ethics*, Part III, Proposition 18, Note 2. All translations are taken from the Samuel Shirley edition.

⁶³ For a detailed study of Spinoza's metaphysical psychology, which shows the incoherence of his naturalism, see Michael Della Rocca, 'Spinoza's Metaphysical Psychology'. This essay constitutes ch. 5 in Garrett, *Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*.

laws of causation. But the ancient Platonic–Stoic praxis of mastering the emotions by reason is not lost; it is transformed. Eventually, according to Spinoza, the very act of understanding the causality of emotions in an adequate way will free us from the hold that some of them can have over us. Our goal is not, as the Stoics thought, to cease to feel, but rather to understand why we feel as we do. Understanding, in Spinoza’s view, reconciles us to the emotions that we have, indeed, that we must have. For emotions come of necessity, as do all other things (1p29, p33). We can as little cease to feel as to live. The Stoic aspiration of transcending emotion is unrealistic. The scientific programme of understanding them, however, will bring that relief from the passions so futilely sought by the ancients.⁶⁴

Although Spinoza has obliterated, at the most fundamental metaphysical level, the mind–body distinction, none the less we can continue to talk coherently as if this distinction still names a difference. In fact, it does. Although mind and body name the same individual entity (or mode), they name it from two different perspectives (2p7s). We can explicate what it is to be human from the perspective of mind and/or from the perspective of body. Each manner of explanation and analysis is valid. What we cannot properly do is mix these explanatory frameworks and violate the methodological distinction between them. In Spinoza’s system, we cannot talk about mind influencing body or vice versa. This is improper since they are, in reality, one and the same; the distinction between them is perspectival.

With this non-dualistic philosophical anthropology in hand, Spinoza turns to an analysis of the emotions. The problem will be that the classical thinkers, as well as Descartes, were on to something when they worried about the tension between reason, i.e., the rational conduct of life, and the volatility of the passions. However, their dualism led them to the false and unworkable conclusion that mind must dominate body; that reason must dominate and control the passions. If reason fails to do so, it is because human character is weak, because someone did not try hard enough, etc. All of this, for Spinoza, is deeply misguided. Yet, the task of living in the light of reason remains. Spinoza too wants passion to be transformed. He wants human beings to achieve blessedness, which for him means

⁶⁴ For Spinoza’s complex relationship with ancient ethics, see Genevieve Lloyd, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Spinoza and the Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 73.

freedom. Freedom means understanding the causal chain of events that flows *of necessity* from God into expression in the modes of the single divine–natural substance that each of us is. To be free is to achieve a rationality that is comprehensive and intuitive. Freedom, of course, is a relative achievement in the necessitarian universe that Spinoza presents. Where everything that happens must happen as it does, freedom inheres principally in understanding why things must be as they are.

Spinoza defines emotion (*affectus*) as ‘the affections of the body by which the body’s power of activity is increased or diminished, assisted or checked, together with the ideas of these affections’ (3d).⁶⁵ He continues: ‘Thus, if we can be the adequate cause of one of the affections, then by emotion I understand activity, otherwise passivity’ (3d). Emotion can thus be active or passive. What does this mean? If we can understand emotion *x* as something of which we ourselves are the cause, the emotion is an action or activity. If we understand emotion *x* in terms of a cause external to ourselves, the emotion is a passion or passivity. We are used to equating emotion and passion in conventional language but, for Spinoza, this is incorrect. To say that an emotion is a passion means that we react or respond to something outside of ourselves; we are passive—acted upon. To say that an emotion is an action means that we are agents; we act out of our own (relative) freedom of agency. Clearly, it is better, because more free, to act than to be acted upon. We act freely when our will tracks our rational understanding. In Spinoza’s view then, those emotions which are manifested in an active way are better than those that can only be manifested in a passive way. As mentioned, the distinction between active and passive has something to do with how we understand the emotion. The distinction turns on whether our ideas as to the causality of the emotion are adequate or inadequate. Spinoza’s concept of adequate and inadequate ideas is technical and brings us into the nexus of his metaphysics and epistemology. For our purposes, let us say that adequacy has to do with the understanding that occurrences have

⁶⁵ By ‘ideas of these affections’ Spinoza indicates that emotions can be explicated either as bodily changes or as mental events. These must, however, be viewed as the same occurrences albeit analysed in terms of different methodological frameworks. See *Ethics* 3p2s: ‘mind and body are one and the same thing, conceived now under the attribute of Thought, now under the attribute of Extension. Hence it comes about that the order or linking of things is one, whether Nature be conceived under this or that attribute, and consequently the order of the active and passive states of our body is simultaneous in Nature with the order of active and passive states of the mind.’

God necessarily as their source. An adequate idea is one that God thinks, so to speak, through the mode of an individual mind (2p40d).⁶⁶ To have an adequate idea of an emotion is to restore it to its ultimate source in God or Nature. We are able to attain this level of redemptive intellection in the case of some but not all emotions.

To return to the other key piece of Spinoza's definition of emotion, what is the significance of 'power of activity?' The idea of an increase or diminution of the body's power of activity is fundamental. Spinoza holds that 'each thing, in so far as it is in itself, endeavors to persist in its own being' (3p6). This drive to persist in being (*conatus*), to fulfil the project of an individual's being constitutes an individual's essence (2p7). Individuals therefore strive towards the increase of their power of activity and seek to avoid its diminution. They thereby pass from states of lesser power (or 'perfection') to greater ones and back again, endeavouring all the while to persist in being. This essential power-increasing drive, when considered from the framework of mind alone, is called 'will'; when considered in the most comprehensive perspective (that is, one that seeks to account for both mind and body), it is called appetite (*appetitus*). Desire (*cupiditas*) is appetite of which we are conscious (2p9s). Desire is the first of the primary emotions.

As the power of activity in our body increases or diminishes, so, from the point of view of the mind, does the power of thought increase or diminish. The increase of the power of thought in the mind constitutes pleasure (*laetitia*); its decrease constitutes pain (*tristitia*). These increases and decreases of power are passive states (*passiones*). In Spinoza's view, regardless of whether the individual passes to a higher state of perfection (pleasure) or a lower one (pain), the individual is not, in this pleasure–pain transition, an agent. These are passions, not actions. Desire, pleasure, and pain are the primary emotions. All the others arise from these (2p11s).

In a somewhat mechanistic way, as befits the scientific aspiration of his age, Spinoza derives the other emotions, including hope, from combinations of desire, pleasure, and pain. Love and hate are the emotions that derive most directly from desire, pleasure, and pain. 'Love is merely "pleasure accompanied by the idea of an external

⁶⁶ Alan Donagan writes: 'Since God cognizes everything that is and hence adequately, an idea in your mind is adequate if it is identical with God's idea of its object . . . ' Alan Donagan, *Spinoza* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 136.

cause”, and hatred is merely “pain accompanied by the idea of an external cause” (3p13s). Now, whether a thing is present to us, and therefore a source of pleasure or pain (and therefore evocative of love or hatred) or remembered from the past or imagined in the future, our minds will still react to it (i.e., to the idea of it) emotionally. Time is irrelevant. Objects in so far as they are present to the mind are present as ideas. Against this background, Spinoza characterizes hope, as well as a cluster of other emotions related to it.

From what has just been said we understand what is Hope (*spes*), Fear (*metus*), Confidence (*securitas*), Despair (*desperatio*), Joy (*gaudium*) and Disappointment (*conscientiae morsus*). Hope is ‘inconstant pleasure, arising from the image of a thing future or past, of whose outcome we are in doubt’. Now if the element of doubt be removed from these emotions, hope becomes confidence and fear becomes despair, that is ‘pleasure or pain arising from a thing which we have feared or have hoped’. Joy is ‘pleasure arising from the image of a past thing of whose outcome we have been in doubt’. Finally, disappointment is ‘the pain opposite to joy’. (3p18s2)

Hope requires both inconstancy—the pleasure at the root of the emotion wavers—and uncertainty. Indeed, the pleasure wavers because of the uncertainty. Doubt is the medium of hope. If one is able to alleviate doubt, hope is transformed into something sturdier—confidence. (Somewhat surprisingly, Spinoza associates confidence with both the past, where doubt as to an outcome can easily be overcome, and the future. Although we cannot know with certainty what will happen in the future, we can have some doubts removed sufficiently so as to sustain confidence. We do not know, but we need not doubt, for example, that the sun will rise tomorrow (da14.) Similarly, if one is able to alleviate doubts about the outcome of something painful, fear becomes despair. The inconstant pain of fear becomes the constant, ineliminable pain of despair. Joy occurs when either the hope or fear towards an occurrence or object in the past, the outcome of which was in doubt, has been resolved. Joy too, like confidence, involves the relief of doubt. Hope and fear, by contrast, are tied to doubt and, hence, although Spinoza does not use the word, anxiety. Thus, pleasure, in the case of hope, or pain, in the case of fear, remain inconstant rather than steady.

Elsewhere (da13, explication), Spinoza analyses the intricate linkage of hope and fear.

From these definitions it follows that there is no hope without fear and no fear without hope. For he who is in hopeful suspense and has doubts as to the outcome of a thing is assumed to be imagining something that excludes the existence of the hoped-for thing, and so to that extent he feels pain. Consequently, as long as he is in hopeful suspense, he fears as to the outcome. On the other hand, he who is in a state of fear, that is, unsure of the occurrence of a thing that he hates, is also imagining something that excludes the existence of the said thing, and so he feels pleasure, and to that extent he entertains hope of its not happening.

The passional nature of hope and fear is fully on display here. The individual is enmeshed in uncertainty and suspense, his agency compromised by his ignorance. At best he can affect an anxious anticipation. He cannot, in such a state, rise to grasp an adequate idea. He cannot understand his emotional condition as issuing from a cause within himself, that is, from God or nature working within himself. He is too dependent on an external object—the object of hope or fear—to be at peace with whatever outcome (necessarily) occurs. For such reasons, Spinoza judges both hope and fear negatively. He writes (4p47ds):

The emotions of hope and fear cannot be good in themselves.

The emotions of hope and fear cannot be without pain. For fear is pain, and there cannot be hope without fear. Therefore these emotions cannot be good in themselves, but only in so far as they can check excessive pleasure.

We should add that these emotions indicate a lack of knowledge and a weakness of mind, and for this reason, too, confidence, despair, joy and disappointment are also indications of our weakness. For although confidence and joy are emotions of pleasure, they imply a preceding pain, namely hope and fear. *Therefore the more we endeavor to live by the guidance of reason, the more we endeavor to be independent of hope, to free ourselves from fear, and to command fortune as far as we can, and to direct our actions by the sure counsel of reason.* (emphasis added)

Without sharing at all in the Stoic metaphysics or moral psychology, Spinoza has come to a remarkably similar conclusion. The dependence of hope and its presumptive opposite, fear, on fortune renders us passive and forever vulnerable. Reason directs us towards self-sufficiency and enables us to ‘command fortune as far as we can’. If hope has any value, it is a modest, incremental one in so far as it can check excessive pleasure. Exactly what this means is explained at 4p54s. Spinoza has just argued that emotions such as pity, humility, and repentance, like hope, are bad in themselves. One might think that

these religious emotions are good in so far as they lead to compassionate behaviour, for example. But Spinoza argues that reason alone has the capacity to guide us to help our fellows. The pain of which these emotions are compounded renders them inherently bad. None the less, an instrumental value remains only because the average person does not live according to reason. In recognition of prevalent human irrationality, Spinoza concedes:

As men seldom live according to the dictates of reason, these two emotions, humility and repentance, and also hope and fear, bring more advantage than harm; and thus, if sin we must, it is better to sin in their direction. For if men of weak spirit should all equally be subject to pride, and should be ashamed of nothing and afraid of nothing, by what bonds could they be held together and bound. The mob is fearsome, if it does not fear. So it is not surprising that the prophets, who had regard for the good of the whole community, and not of the few, have been so zealous in commending humility, repentance, and reverence. And in fact those who are subject to these emotions can be far more readily induced than others to live by the guidance of reason in the end, that is, to become free men and enjoy the life of the blessed (4p54s).

The justification for granting hope an instrumental value rests on a remarkably political, rather Machiavellian, assertion.⁶⁷ Social order requires cooptation; leaders cannot govern by force alone. They must make their populations tractable and cooperative through religious myths and values. Given the irrationality and sinfulness of humans, religious leaders such as the prophets are better able to restrain the mob and induce obedience if they appeal to archetypal religious values rather than to reason. Here Spinoza gestures towards his elaborate theory of religion and politics, given in his *Political Theological Treatise (Tractatus Theologico-Politicus)*.

The *Tractatus*, which became immediately notorious after its anonymous publication in 1670, offers a complementary perspective on hope. But it also propounds a comprehensive political hope of its own. Although Spinoza, as a philosopher, is rather disparaging towards hope, as a citizen, so to speak, he hopes for the rise of a secular, pluralistic, democratic, and liberal society, as well as the demise of a religious, superstitious, and illiberal one. In the *Tractatus* Spinoza permits himself a visionary hope for a free society in which everyone—

⁶⁷ On the relationship between Spinoza and Machiavelli, see Edwin Curley, 'Kissinger, Spinoza and Genghis Khan', in Garrett, *Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, 327–33.

Jews, philosophers, and others have a right to participate in governance and to express opinions of all sorts without intimidation.⁶⁸

Spinoza's account of the origin of political society, like Hobbes's, employs the notion of a social contract. In a sense, that contract arises due to hope (and fear). Spinoza believes, unlike even Hobbes whose denizens of the state of nature have an incipient moral sense sufficient for them to keep their promise to enter into a contract with one another, that the state of nature is entirely without moral conditions. Right, for Spinoza, is equivalent to power, to the *conatus*. Natural right is coextensive with natural power. Spinoza empties the term 'right' of any moral significance. Why would humans in the state of nature give up their right/power? '[I]t is a universal law of human nature that no one ever neglects anything which he judges to be good, *except with the hope of gaining a greater good, or from the fear of a greater evil . . .*' And, further, '[N]o one can honestly promise to forego the right which he has over all things, and in general no one will abide by his promises, unless under the fear of a greater evil, or *the hope of a greater good*'.⁶⁹ The compact between persons out of which political order arises is motivated by hope (and fear). It is warranted, however, by considerations of utility. Spinoza does not believe that persons have a moral duty, in the state of nature, to keep their promises to one another. Once the social compact is formed, unless it continues to provide persons with more benefit than harm, there is no moral duty to make it endure. Spinoza disagrees with Hobbes that one can permanently alienate one's right/power to a sovereign. His doctrine of *conatus*, as the essence of individual being, undercuts such a permanent and formal diminution of power. A reversion to the state of nature might well be less injurious than a disadvantageous social bond. What then restrains persons from dissolving the compact that they have made? In addition to the benefit that society must actually provide, Spinoza asserts that persons must be 'restrained by the hope of some greater good, or the fear of some greater evil'.⁷⁰ Thus, hope plays not only an originary role, but an ongoing contributory role in the project of political society.

⁶⁸ On Spinoza's status as a founder, comparable to Locke, for democratic orders, see Stephen B. Smith, *Spinoza, Liberalism and the Question of Jewish Identity* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988).

⁶⁹ *Theologico-Political Treatise*, ch. 16, in R. H. M. Elwes (trans.), *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza* (New York: Dover, 1951), 203 (emphasis added).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 204.

Hope helps to keep political society going. Spinoza believes that democracy, a political society in which power is diffused and widely shared, is the most natural form of government. In it, ‘no one transfers his natural right so absolutely that he has no further voice in affairs, he only hands it over to the majority of society, of which he is a unit. Thus all men remain, as they were in the state of nature, equals’.⁷¹ In so far as they are stakeholders, citizens of a democracy have more to lose through dissolving the political bond than by retaining it. They have a warrant for their hope that political society will prove advantageous to them. Although suspicious of hope qua passion, Spinoza invests hope (and fear) with a key role in the maintenance of the political order. He limits hope but he does not eliminate it. Nor could he. Hope is crucial to the kind of humane politics Spinoza recommends. Although philosophically discreditable, hope is required to inaugurate a democratic age.

Schopenhauer

No philosopher of rank did more to promote a pessimistic outlook than Arthur Schopenhauer. Pessimism ought to be understood as a philosophy of life, rather than a mood, disposition, or emotional condition. It is a philosophy of life in which hope (at least robust hope) figures prominently as a vice. Although it is tempting to speculate about, for example, Schopenhauer’s defence, indeed praise, of suicide in light of his father’s suicide, such psychological reductionism is philosophically unilluminating. Pessimism is given a philosophical articulation and defence by Schopenhauer and deserves to be engaged in a similar manner.

Pessimism is a modern philosophy, with ancient antecedents. Its contemporary apologist, Joshua Foa Dienstag, argues that pessimism—of the kinds advocated by Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Rousseau, Leopardi, Freud, and others—could only arise in a disenchanting world where sacred forces had been replaced by naturalistic and mechanistic ones.⁷² In such a world, time became strictly linear and measurable. Divided into identical quanta by the spread of mechanical devices such as

⁷¹ Ibid. 207.

⁷² Joshua Foa Dienstag, *Pessimism: Philosophy, Ethic, Spirit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), esp. the thematic–analytic first chapter.

reliable clocks, and thus standardized, time itself became disenchanted. Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow could be thought to creep in this petty pace from day to day. The last syllable of recorded time would bring nothing fundamentally different from what already is. Boredom became a real option, not just for reasons of increased affluence and leisure in an industrializing age, but for metaphysical reasons as well. (Schopenhauer writes: 'Not the least of the torments which plague our existence is the constant pressure of time, which never lets us so much as draw breath but pursues all like a taskmaster with a whip. It ceases to persecute only him it has delivered over to boredom.'⁷³) Time was emptied of the significance Jews and Christians had imparted to it. The texture of time, as punctuated by the sacred occasions of Sabbaths and holidays, flattened out as the sacred lost its plausibility. Time was felt as a burden. Unlike the animals, which exist in time but are not aware of the time-bound quality of their existence, the human horizon is oppressed by time. Time runs out. Being flows towards death. The very consciousness which allows me to say 'I'—that sense of time that enables a diurnal human identity—is also a shadow, a gathering darkness.

Pessimism required a modern time-consciousness, according to Dienstag, as well as a disillusionment with the modern surrogate for reclaiming a significance for time—progress.⁷⁴ Moderns may have replaced sacred time with mechanical time; but as they banished one sort of myth they smuggled in another. Progress reinvested time with significance. It lent it telos and meaning; it underwrote human agency and purpose. People were led to believe that they could bring the millennium through their own scientifically disciplined exertions. The Lord may no longer be the Lord of history but a functional equivalent of the Day of the Lord remained. A secular eschatology replaced a Christian one. Pessimists such as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche reacted strongly against the faith in progress. Pessimists need not deny that discrete advances occur in certain areas—medicine, for example. They deny that these examples of progress fundamentally ameliorate the human condition and change its terms. They are more impressed with the human problems that progress engenders than the problems

⁷³ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), 42.

⁷⁴ Dienstag, *Pessimism*, 16.

that progressive innovation solves. On balance, they believe, life is still suffering. Not only is real happiness unattainable; it is itself a pernicious illusion that is best abandoned if life is to be lived bravely. Given such an orientation, hope is a particularly vicious charade.

Schopenhauer's philosophy is based, as is Spinoza's, on a metaphysics from which large moral consequences are drawn.⁷⁵ As an ardent though critical follower of Kant, Schopenhauer accepts the Kantian distinction between a phenomenal world (that is, the world as structured by the categories of our understanding) and a noumenal world (that is, the world as it is in itself). The world that we experience, talk about, cognize, recognize ourselves within, and manipulate is the world of phenomena or, in Schopenhauer's idiom, representations (*Vorstellungen*). It is the only world that we can know in so far as it is the world to which our means of knowing, our minds, are adapted. It is a world of causation and necessity; a world in which freedom is impossible. Every event that we discern in the phenomenal world has a cause. A sufficiently discerning mind can find a sufficient reason for every phenomenal occurrence. For Kant, the extra-mental border of the world—the thing-in-itself—was irremediably unknowable, at least for the Kant of *Critique of Pure Reason*. In the second Critique, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant himself trespasses that limit and construes the self, as a free moral agent, as a knowable individual in a noumenal world. Schopenhauer develops this controversial Kantian insight. For Schopenhauer, the self, construed as a free moral agent, exempt in some way from the web of causal necessity, provides a kind of access to the world of things-in-themselves. That access is opened to us by our consciousness of ourselves as will (*Wille*), first sensed in the working of our own bodies. We feel, that is, that our bodies are moved by us, by something within us. We intuit ourselves to be, at bottom, different from other objects which can be moved but do not move themselves.⁷⁶ Furthermore, that mysterious inner motion appears to be uncaused, or at least not caused in the way external motion occurs, in a way describable by Newtonian mechanics.

⁷⁵ This brief exposition of Schopenhauer's core views follows those of Christopher Janaway, *Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), esp. 5–12; Roger Scruton, *A Short History of Modern Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 185–91; and Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760–1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 333–45.

⁷⁶ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, trans. R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp, 3 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), ii. 18, 116.

In one sense, our awareness of ourselves as manifestations of energy, striving, *conatus*, that is, of will remains part of the phenomenal order of representation. *Wille* can simply denote another concept we employ to make sense of our experience, including our experience of ourselves. In another sense, however, our awareness of ourselves under the rubric of will amounts to a *sensus numinus*: a privileged access to a level of reality more primordial than the world of representations.

Will is an ambivalent category for Schopenhauer. As the very living stuff of reality, it has more actuality and thus, in a sense, more value than representation. It is ontologically fundamental, timeless, and unitary. To sense ourselves as manifestations or objectifications of a timeless universal will is to see ourselves aright. Individual identity (*principium individuationis*) is merely a feature of the world as representation. Behind the veil of the representations lies the eternal, inexhaustible oneness of the will. Dissolving our illusory individual identity into the oneness of the will, through an infinite attitude of renunciation, brings a kind of redemption. This is a root of Schopenhauer's pessimism. Radical self-abnegation, that is, the rejection of the illusion of individuality, unites us with the primordial reality of the world-in-itself. We must cease to care about the self and its projects, cease to invest concern in time and its repetitive accumulation. Schopenhauer is lavish in his praise of Hinduism and Buddhism, which he believes have obtained the basic truths of metaphysics more insightfully than Western religions. (In his view, true Christianity is also a religion of asceticism and self-abnegation. Judaism, however, is a worldly, optimistic religion and therefore most pernicious. Judaism takes as real self, world, and time. Consequently, it envisions achieving happiness within 'reality' as its highest goal. It must perforce be optimistic.) Hinduism and Buddhism are, as he sees them, religions of renunciation. They have abandoned hope in the amelioration of life. Life itself is the condition they renounce.

Will, however, also remains problematic. Precisely because will is ceaseless striving, to give oneself over to this ontological foundation is to give oneself over to infinite activity. This is precisely what must be renounced. How can we then secure the all important possibility of the renunciation of action, of the will per se? Schopenhauer introduces another technical concept to resolve this problem, the Idea.⁷⁷ An Idea,

⁷⁷ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, trans. R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp, 3 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), iii. 30, 182.

in Schopenhauer's idiom, is a comprehensive grasp of the condition of the will. An Idea (Schopenhauer also counted Plato among his teachers) is a universal form in terms of which the will is grasped. Recalling that individuation is a condition of the world as representation, the Idea offers us a means of intellectual escape from cognizing the will (and ourselves qua will) solely in terms of representations. The Idea of the will—Platonic entity that it is—resides not in individuals but in species. Nature is indifferent to individuals; they come and go. But species remain. To grasp nature's indifference to us as individuals yet to affirm the endurance of species is at once an intellectual act of recognition and a redemptive act of renunciation. Abandonment of the *principium individuationis*, of the will and its works, is to step off the wheel of Samsara. Life, death, fear, and hope become matters of indifference.

Grasping an Idea removes us from both the workaday cognition that traffics in representations and the restless activity of striving and desire (of will). Platonist that he is, Schopenhauer assumed that we are capable of a 'better consciousness'; that we can rise above 'the misery of willing... and so celebrate a holiday from the penal labour of willing'.⁷⁸ Short of the complete renunciation of the world-as-will that complete redemption requires, there are moments of what Michael Oakeshott would call 'delight'. The contemplation of aesthetic objects, particularly works of music, frees us from relations of desire for and manipulation of representations and quiets the will. Aesthetic contemplation relaxes the grip of time on us.

Hope, by contrast, is the very emblem of the grip of time. Like animals, which pursue their projects of survival in the immediacy of the moment, human beings are no less animalistic in their striving. Unlike animals, they are burdened, however, by a painful and tumultuous self-consciousness. Human self-awareness 'arises first and foremost because with [humans] everything is powerfully intensified by the thinking about absent and future things, and this is the origin of care, fear and hope, which, once they have been aroused, make a far stronger impression on men than do actual or present pleasures or sufferings, to which the animal is limited'.⁷⁹ The consciousness of time brings the knowledge of death; it brings an anxiety that pervades and undermines

⁷⁸ Quoted in Janaway, *Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy*, 273.

⁷⁹ Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms*, 44.

every fleeting moment of pleasure. Animals, living as they do in the present, are 'without hope and therefore [have] no share in that anticipation of a happy future which, together with the enchanting products of the imagination which accompany it, is the source of most of our greatest joys and pleasures'.⁸⁰ But these pleasures are illusory ('no rose without a thorn but many a thorn without a rose'⁸¹). The satisfaction of desire merely establishes the conditions for further desire.

To hope for future fulfilments is thereby to hope for future disappointments. It is perverse to hope. Expectation blinds us. '[T]hough we live all our lives in the expectation of better things, we often at the same time long regretfully for what is past'. Oriented towards the future in hopeful expectation, we consider the present a mere means to an end. Yet, when the end arrives, human beings 'are surprised to see that which they let go by so unregarded and unenjoyed was precisely their life, was precisely that in expectation of which they lived'.⁸² Hence, the perversity, indeed, the absurdity of hope. Not that we should simply, as if we were animals, accept the brute facticity of our present and find contentment in it. That is not possible, except for those occasional transports of aesthetic experience. Schopenhauer does not want us to resign ourselves to our human lot; he wants us to resign our humanity altogether. It is life itself that must be denied.

Schopenhauer teaches that we ought to deny the will to live. This implies the legitimacy, sagacity, and nobility of suicide as well as an ethic of disengagement from ordinary human cares and concerns. Schopenhauer indicts Judaism for criminalizing suicide.⁸³ He finds Christianity, despite its ecclesiastical prohibition of suicide, to be in fundamental accord with the intention of suicide. That is, 'Christianity carries in its innermost heart the truth that suffering (the Cross) is the true aim of life'. It repudiates suicide because the latter cuts short one's experience of suffering. None the less, both classical culture, which endorsed suicide, and Christianity agree on the nature of life as suffering; both affirm an ascetic response to life. Therefore, the disagreement between Christianity and Seneca, for example, should not

⁸⁰ Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms*, 45. In another formulation, 'Hope is the confusion of the desire for a thing with its probability' (p. 168). That is, both animals and humans—as manifestations of will—desire but only humans can conceptualize their desire and map it onto time. Hope is desire enmeshed in the thought that it will be realized.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 35.

⁸² *Ibid.* 53.

⁸³ *Ibid.* 77.

be seen as fundamental. Suicide might be seen as a mistake from a Christian point of view, but it should not be seen as a crime.

The characterization of suicide as criminal reveals the continuing baleful influence of Judaism. Schopenhauer, a true follower of Marcion, is one of the most anti-Jewish philosophers.⁸⁴ Anything of lingering value in Christianity is divorced from its Jewish roots; Judaism remains the source of everything pernicious and false. Everything wrong with Christianity reflects continuing Judaic tendencies. As for suicide, the problem is that Judaism ('naked, despotic theism'⁸⁵) and Christianity (in so far as it foolishly continues to follow Judaism) take it as an insult to the (fictitious) God who proclaimed the goodness of creation.

It therefore seems that the extraordinary zeal in opposing [suicide] displayed by the clergy of monotheistic religions—a zeal which is not supported by the Bible or by any cogent reasons—must have some hidden reason behind it: may this not be that the voluntary surrender of life is an ill compliment to him who said that all things were very good? If so, it is another instance of the *obligatory optimism* of these religions, which denounces self-destruction so as not to be denounced by it.⁸⁶

The denial that creation is good, that life is good regardless of suffering, separates Schopenhauer fundamentally from Judaism and Christianity. Schopenhauer's assertion that 'life is an expiation of the crime of being born' is inadmissible from the perspective of biblical theism. Life, including its termination in death, is affirmed as good by the biblical creation story. In the imaginative, midrashic tradition of Jewish biblical interpretation, 'very' (in Gen. 1: 31 'God saw all that He had made, and found it very good') stands variously for death, the angel of death, the evil inclination, suffering—all of these negatives dwarfed by the positive value of existence itself.⁸⁷ For Schopenhauer, by contrast, life

⁸⁴ For an excellent, thorough study of Schopenhauer and Judaism, see Henry Walter Brann, *Schopenhauer und das Judentum* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1975). Brann points out that as extreme as his animus against Judaism was, Schopenhauer did not despise Jews as such. Indeed, he had close Jewish friends. As to Judaism, he equated it with theism and optimism, both of which his philosophy strenuously opposes. For a sample of Schopenhauer's nasty bon mots about Judaism, see: 'How innocent was the pastime of Father Zeus compared with the bloodthirsty activities of Jehovah and his chosen brigands' (*Essays and Aphorisms*, 220). See also the section of the aphorisms 'On Religion' in which constant invidious comparisons are drawn between Judaism and other traditions (ibid. 180–97).

⁸⁵ Ibid. 63.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 78 (emphasis added).

⁸⁷ *Genesis Rabbah*, ch. 9 (paras. 5–11).

itself is punishment: 'everything that lives must atone for its existence, first by living and then by dying'.⁸⁸

It is difficult to square Schopenhauer's studied rejection of the will to live, of life as such, with the very intention of his creative endeavour. If life is not to be affirmed, why write books? Why seek to persuade others to adopt your outlook for the sake of their own 'salvation'? Why care for human welfare, which Schopenhauer evidently did? In a particularly moving passage, Schopenhauer writes of a report that he had read on slavery in America.

No one can read it without horror, and few will not be reduced to tears: for whatever the reader of it may have heard or imagined or dreamed of the unhappy condition of the slaves, indeed of human harshness and cruelty in general, will fade into insignificance when he reads how these devils in human form, these bigoted, church-going, Sabbath-keeping scoundrels, especially the Anglican parsons among them, treat their innocent black brothers whom force and injustice have delivered into their devilish clutches.⁸⁹

Schopenhauer was no stranger to compassion. Indeed, he established a rather conventional ethics on a radically unconventional metaphysical base. Schopenhauer rejects some of the traditional Western virtues, including the 'theological virtues' of faith, hope, and charity, but he accepts the Buddhist virtue of compassion in so far as it is based on self-abnegation. Whereas Western virtues cultivate and reinforce the illusion of individuality, denying the will to live leads to compassionate identification with all other beings. It is in this sense that Schopenhauer equates his teaching with the core of Christianity (which, in its true version, he sees as a religion of ascetic self-denial).

Schopenhauer would seek to justify his engagements on the grounds of his philosophy but it is hard to see how he could do so coherently.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms*, 140. For an analysis of the view that tragedy is in part constituted by the conviction that existence per se entails guilt, see Karl Jaspers, *Tragedy is not Enough*, trans. Harald A. T. Reiche (Boston: Beacon Press, 1952), 53–4.

⁸⁹ Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms*, 138.

⁹⁰ Schopenhauer argues that giving up on the illusory self frees us to recognize that we are all essentially one; we are all manifestations of the thing-in-itself, qua will. We should thus cease to care about ourselves as individuals. We are free to act selflessly, compassionately, towards others. To the extent that we are individuals, we are 'at bottom a dreadful wild animal' (ibid.). Once we relinquish our attachment to individuality and become dispassionate towards ourselves, we can freely relate to others as equals. Other than the paradox of caring for others once we have, presumably, abandoned the will to care there is also the problem of *why* we should care for others. To care is to take an interest. How can a being who has ceased to be an individual have interests? If one practises caring only to show (whom? oneself?) that one negates the self, isn't that very act, paradoxically,

How can caring be justified by a philosophy which urges us to take leave of caring? We care because we want to protect the good. But how can one care if nothing, except death, is good? No activity except the renunciation of life can coherently be justified but that one gesture is precisely what Schopenhauer's entire endeavour belies. The contradiction between his ethical values and the philosophy which sought to make sense of them undermines or at least strains his philosophy. This is also the *nisus* of Nietzsche's critique of Schopenhauer. Nietzsche criticized Schopenhauer not for the incoherence of his metaphysics and his ethics but for his having an ethics altogether. Ultimately, his pessimism notwithstanding, Schopenhauer continued to uphold and commend a more or less conventional moral conduct. Nietzsche, whose philosophy recommends the 'transvaluation of all values', will have none of it. Nor will Nietzsche accept a philosophy of world renunciation. He repudiates Schopenhauer's repudiation of life, seizing life with a vengeance. In Nietzsche's rejection of all inherited morality, he also shows himself to be an enemy of hope.

Nietzsche

Nietzsche began his career as an intellectual rebel with *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), in which he contrasted the 'Dionysian' with the 'Apollonian' mode of life. As with Schopenhauer's sharp distinction between Western theism and Eastern tragic wisdom, Nietzsche too developed a sharp contrast between Dionysus's tragic realism and Apollo's false and optimistic idealism. Greek tragedy was born in the recognition of the instability, chaos, and perpetual flux of life. There is no fixed centre or foundation. Becoming, not Being, is the primary ontological category. Its god is Dionysus, who celebrates the spontaneous, unruly, orgiastic, violent, and untamable dimensions of life. Tragedy is not, as Aristotle thought, an emotional catharsis which allows us to reconcile ourselves to the hardships of life (*Poetics* 1449b). Tragedy is not therapy after which we regain our equilibrium. Tragedy dramatically presents the recognition that life is all hardship,

self-centered? In this ethic, one does not honour the dignity of another by responding to that person in a moral manner—for such criteria as dignity have been discarded in the metaphysical negation of individuality. Individuals in Schopenhauer's world lack even the status of modes under Spinoza's metaphysical monism. It is difficult to see what ethics can mean in a world without individuals.

all disequilibrium. There is no stable centre to which we can return. Tragedy is a mirror of life that allows us to see it aright, without comfort or the illusion of happiness.⁹¹

This is the tragic wisdom of Dionysus. It remained the wisdom of at least some of the pre-Socratics. It became intolerable, however, to Socrates (that ‘despotic logician’⁹²), Plato, and their successors. They sought an ontological foundation for Being and for values that could be secured by thought.

As against [tragedy’s] practical pessimism, Socrates represents the archetype of the theoretical optimist, who, strong in the belief that nature can be fathomed, considers knowledge to be the true panacea and error to be radical evil. To Socratic man the one noble and truly human occupation was that of laying bare the workings of nature, of separating true knowledge from illusion and error. So it happened that ever since Socrates the mechanism of concepts, judgments, and syllogisms has come to be regarded as the highest exercise of man’s powers, nature’s most admirable gift.⁹³

Thus commenced the ascendancy of Apollo. Dionysus presided over music, which signifies the perpetual flux of becoming. Apollo presides over the plastic arts, which signify the purported stasis of Being. With the eclipse of Dionysus, philosophic rationalism replaced tragedy as a mode of expression and a way of life. Hope for understanding the putatively rational order of nature and for basing human conduct on that order flourished. With this, intellectual dishonesty, cowardice, and existential etiolation took over. Nietzsche builds on this nexus of weakness, optimism, and neglect of tragic truth in his subsequent work. The villain in the piece, however, shifts from Socratic rationalism to Christianity. (There are other great villains as well: Judaism, modernity, democracy, bourgeois morality. All are mutually implicated in Nietzsche’s pathology of culture.) It is in the context of his sustained and vituperative assault on Christianity that he condemns the latter’s glorification of hope.

It is difficult to over-exaggerate Nietzsche’s contempt for Christianity. His philosophical accusations are sharply articulated in two of

⁹¹ Dienstag, *Pessimism*, 166–73.

⁹² Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of the Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golting (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956), 90. For further remarks on Socrates, see Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: Random House, 1974), para. 340.

⁹³ Nietzsche, *The Birth of the Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*, 94.

his late books, written before his descent into madness: *The Genealogy of Morals: An Attack* (1887) and *The Antichrist* (1888). Given Nietzsche's metaphysics of the world as a perpetual flux, as constant becoming, there can be no stable ground for the basic evaluative terms of ethics, good, and evil. Good and evil, like all values, are human constructs; they grow out of nothing more than human interests.⁹⁴ Originally, in Nietzsche's view, the term 'good' referred to the way of life, attitudes, and practices of nobles; of the aristocratic and heroic elements of ancient societies. 'Bad' referred to the corresponding aspects of the lower orders. As rulers, the nobles had the lordly right to name. Hence, 'good' in the various ancient languages named their own self-interested values. The noble, 'good' morality 'grows out of triumphant self-affirmation'. Noble men

revert to the innocence of wild animals: we can imagine them returning from an orgy of murder, arson, rape, and torture, jubilant and at peace with themselves as though they had committed a fraternity prank—convinced moreover that the poets for a long time to come will have something to sing about and praise.⁹⁵

These 'good' values—the values of, as Nietzsche notoriously put it—'the blond Teutonic beast' were subverted in the course of time by the 'bad' values of a conquered, humiliated, and crushed 'race'—namely, the Jews. Nurturing an implacable resentment towards their various conquerors, the Jews 'succeeded in avenging themselves on their enemies and oppressors by radically inverting all their values'. Nietzsche continues:

It was the Jew who, with frightening consistency, dared to invert the aristocratic value equations of good/noble/powerful/beautiful/happy/favored-of-the-gods and maintain, with the furious hatred of the underprivileged and impotent, that 'only the poor, the powerless, are good; only the suffering, sick, and ugly, truly blessed. But you noble and mighty ones of the earth will be, to all eternity, the evil, the cruel, the avaricious, the godless, and thus the cursed and damned!'⁹⁶

The Jewish 'vengeance and hatred', the deepest such hatred in human history, would not have succeeded in inverting the noble morality were it not for (parodying Paul) a 'branch' that grew from the Jewish

⁹⁴ Ibid. 151. ⁹⁵ Ibid. 174.

⁹⁶ Ibid. 167–8. On the Jews, cf. *The Gay Science*, paras. 135–40, 348.

'tree', Christianity. Where Judaism was driven by hatred, Christianity claimed to promote these now inverted values out of love. 'But let no one surmise', Nietzsche asserts, 'that this love represented a denial of the thirst for vengeance, that it contravened the Jewish hatred'. He continues

Exactly the opposite is true. Love grew out of hatred as the tree's crown, spreading triumphantly in the purest sunlight, yet having, in its high and sunny realm, the same aims—victory, aggrandizement, temptation—which hatred pursued by digging its roots ever deeper. . . . Jesus of Nazareth, the gospel of love made flesh, the 'redeemer', who brought blessing and victory to the poor, the sick, the sinners—what was he but temptation in its most sinister and irresistible form, bringing men in a roundabout way to precisely those Jewish values and renovations of the ideal? Has not Israel, precisely by the detour of this 'redeemer', this seeming antagonist and destroyer of Israel, reached the final goal of its sublime vindictiveness?⁹⁷

The spread of a Judeo-Christian ethic of compassion, rather than of noble contempt for the poor and the weak, indicates for Nietzsche the perverse and fatal dominance of a 'slave morality'. Morality, at its best, has to do with the potentiation of vital forces within the individual or group. Noble morality celebrated such Dionysian power. Anything that inhibits, shunts, denies, or restricts vitality is truly deserving of the judgement 'bad'. Pity (in agreement here with Spinoza) is such a thing. It causes the powerful to doubt his power and descend to solicitude for the weak. It is the revenge of the powerless on the powerful. Thus, Nietzsche claims to have unmasked the ferocious hypocrisy of Christianity morality. Love is a mask of resentment. Compassion is a weapon against all that was once 'good'.

The real content then of the theological virtues, faith, hope, and love, is different from what Christians naively imagine it to be. Nietzsche writes, in mocking irony, 'the thing they hope for and believe in is not vengeance, the sweet exultation of vengeance ("sweeter than honey" as Homer said), but "the triumph of God who is just over the godless"'.⁹⁸ As they await 'their' Kingdom of God, they live in faith, hope, and love. The Kingdom of God is their fictive compensation, Nietzsche alleges, for the humiliations of living in faith, hope, and love during their terrestrial

⁹⁷ Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*, 168–9. For an equally dyspeptic analysis of love, cf. *The Gay Science*, para. 14.

⁹⁸ Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*, 182.

sojourn. The last will soon enough be first. The hope for the Kingdom is little more than a hypocritical hope for revenge. Nietzsche cites a long passage from the Church Father, Tertullian, which is full of images of the suffering of the damned in the next world. Tertullian's triumphant tone of exultation in the eternal punishment of the once powerful clinches, for Nietzsche, his argument that Christianity is a veiled revenge fantasy.

In *Antichrist*, Nietzsche develops this thought in a slightly different way. In that context, the issue is a purported 'oriental' disregard for truth. Truth and the belief (including the entirely cynical and self-serving belief) that something is true are held to be distinct. The 'oriental' indulges the latter at the expense of the former, with all the intellectual and moral cowardice that this ploy entails. It is a matter of indifference whether something is true or not; it is a matter of the highest consequence that it should be believed to be true. The Christian virtue of faith, according to Nietzsche, enshrines this invidious dichotomy. 'If, however, faith is above all necessary, then reason, knowledge, and scientific research must be brought into evil repute; the road to truth becomes the *forbidden* road'.⁹⁹ Hope collaborates in this cowardly retreat into self-deception and abstraction.

Strong *hope* is a much greater stimulant of life than any single realized joy could be. Sufferers must be sustained by a hope which no actuality can contradict—and which cannot ever be realized: the hope of another world. (Precisely on account of this power that hope has of making the unhappy linger on, the Greeks regarded it as the evil of evils, as the most mischievous evil: it remained behind in Pandora's box).¹⁰⁰

Hope and faith forestall or prevent a courageous confrontation with tragic reality. They prevent us from hearing the voice of the madman, who screams at us that God is dead and that we have killed him.¹⁰¹

No less than Spinoza and Schopenhauer, however, Nietzsche cannot entirely abandon hope. He has hopes of his own. He hopes for the emergence of a new type of man committed to smashing all of the idols of decadent Judeo-Christian Europe and inventing himself anew, without compass or polestar other than the 'love of fate' (*amor fati*). *Amor fati* signifies something beyond Stoic or Spinozist acceptance of

⁹⁹ Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000), 28–9.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, para. 125. Cf. *Zarathustra*, para. 2.

necessity. It signifies defiant love of necessity, not reconciliation with but *celebration* of fate. Nietzsche's heroic-rebellious ideal is bound up with his doctrine of the 'eternal recurrence', the view that, over infinite time, all events will repeat themselves. Our lives will be lived in the same way over and over again. This view should be taken less as a metaphysical claim than as a provocation to evaluative reflection on how we live our lives now.¹⁰² In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche presents us with a thought experiment. How would we act if a demon came to us and told us that 'This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it but every pain and every joy . . . must return to you . . .' Would this crush us or compel us to accept our lives with unblinking honesty? Could we rise to 'crave nothing more fervently than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal'?¹⁰³ The joyful embrace of an eternal repetition of our lives signals the creative defiance of *amor fati*. Such creative defiance is the mark of Nietzsche's new nobleman, the *Übermensch*.

Nietzsche writes, with hope, of the possibility of a future humanity, of a new nobility, that will be able to hold together all the contradictions of life in one thought and yet greet the day with defiant joy. He hopes for a hero who can go 'out to meet at the same time one's highest suffering and one's highest hope';¹⁰⁴ a warrior who after a brutal battle in which he has lost his friend is able, as the battle resumes on its second day, to

welcome the dawn and his fortune, being a person whose horizon encompasses thousands of years past and future, being the heir of all the nobility of all past spirit—an heir with a sense of obligation, the most aristocratic of old nobles and at the same time the first of a new nobility—the like of which no age has yet seen or dreamed of; if one could burden one's soul with all of this—the oldest, the newest, losses, hopes, conquests, and the victories of humanity; if one could finally contain all this in one soul and crowd it into a single feeling—this would surely have to result in a happiness that humanity has not known so far: the happiness of a god full of power and love, full of tears and laughter, a happiness that, like the sun in the evening, continually bestows its inexhaustible riches, pouring them into the sea, feeling richest, as the sun

¹⁰² Lawrence J. Hatab, *Nietzsche and Eternal Recurrence: The Redemption of Time and Becoming* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1978), 94. For a similar non-metaphysical interpretation of this concept, see also Dienstag, *Pessimism*, 194.

¹⁰³ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, para. 341.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* para.268.

does, only when even the poorest fisherman is still rowing with golden oars! This godlike feeling would then be called—humanness.¹⁰⁵

In a world where God is dead (because we have murdered him) man must become a god. In becoming a god, he becomes, for the first time, a true man. Such a thought is the founding charter of a radical new paganism, anticipated by the Enlightenment but not heretofore stated with such brutal clarity.

Nietzsche's teaching on hope is paradoxical. He wants to reduce or diminish hope by assimilating it to a new, *über*-emotion, which will be felt by the new, heroic breed of *Übermenschen*. This would effectively nullify hope as a force of its own. To comprise hope and loss within a single feeling—and to acquiesce to this feeling—is to terminate hope as we know it and offer something new in its stead. At the same time, however, it is Nietzsche's hope that the *Übermensch* will become a reality. He, no less than Spinoza or Schopenhauer, hopes that his preferred prescription for the human future can be brought about. Hope may be reduced in scope, questioned, chastened, and delimited but it cannot, it seems, be eliminated. Where there is life, there is hope. Thus, literary or philosophical attempts, both ancient and modern, to negate hope fully are threatened by self-contradiction. The affirmation, rather than the negation, of hope has a claim to a higher coherence. Although hope is ineliminable, however, one could still argue that it is neither virtuous nor wise to indulge it too much, just as it is neither virtuous nor wise to indulge any passion, compulsion, or drive to excess. It is neither virtuous nor wise because life is tragic and although we may rail against and resist tragedy in the end the wise and virtuous person should accept it with Socratic or Stoic resignation. It is the conviction of the tragic character of life that diminishes the significance of hope as a topic in Greek thought and that launches the protest against Jewish and Christian morality in the moderns.

In the next chapter we consider the affirmation of hope (the roots of hope as virtue and wisdom) within ancient Judaism and Christianity. We will attempt to inquire whether biblical faith resists tragedy and the accompanying negation of hope on rational grounds or whether it, in the end, is just the contingent belief of a set of ancient cultures and their spiritual descendants. Does hope, grounded in biblical faith, present arguments that are compelling even for those who take no conscious share in that faith?

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. para. 337.

4

The Faith of Hope

As we saw in our discussion of Aquinas and Albo, hope can be thought to rise from a passion to a virtue under the impress of divine revelation. Were it not for God's encounter with our scriptural traditions, our communities, and our personal lives hope would retain a purely natural status. Instead, in both Aquinas's and Albo's views, hope becomes a response to an outpouring of divine presence. Hope responds to divine disclosure and fidelity. We trust, have faith, and hope in God on the basis of what he has done and what, we believe, he will do for us and for his creation. We turned next to a tradition which knows of gods and which, in its philosophical moments, converges on a metaphysical monotheism, but which does not know the God of Israel. We saw that hope plays an ambiguous, limited, or negative role. We looked then at some modern philosophers, who treat the Jewish and Christian heritages with great circumspection or outright contempt. Although the modern philosophical tradition relies to an extent on Aquinas's treatment of the passions, it dispenses with the notion of a theological virtue. It treats the mind, in its capacities of thought, will, and emotion in as purely immanent and natural a way as it can, in tune with the scientific rationalism of its time. By the nineteenth century, under the impact of Romanticism, the Enlightenment emphasis on the supremacy of reason over will and emotion came in for a severe critique. Although the Dionysian life based on will and emotion is put forward as superior to the Apollonian life of reason, hope became a disfavoured emotion. Nietzsche, who was most sensitive to the biblical elevation of hope, was most disparaging towards it. His war on Judaism and Christianity required many salvos against an essential trope of those traditions—hope in God. Let us now consider the Jewish and Christian traditions from which Aquinas and Albo drew, and against

which Spinoza, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche fought, on their own merits. We look first at hope in the Hebrew Scriptures and in rabbinic Judaism and then in the New Testament and in Augustine.

Hope in the Hebrew Scriptures

Hope is a recurrent theme of the Hebrew Scriptures (or the Old Testament, as Christians call it). Hope is both individual and collective. Individual persons hope for mundane things, such as wisdom, justice, and security, as well as for more metaphysically charged objects, such as closeness with God and divine help in the face of suffering, opposition, and death. The people Israel hope for fidelity to God's teaching, restoration of its relationship with God, collective deliverance from threats, and righteousness. A symbolic vehicle for collective hope is the idea of an anointed future king, a messiah. The hope for a messiah takes shape against theo-political aspirations and ideals in the Hebrew Scriptures, crystallizes in post-biblical Judaism, and centrally informs the nascent Christian tradition. There are also, eventually, hopes for psycho-physical resurrection after death, deliverance from the tragedy of Sheol, or for eternal life in closeness to God. The evolution of these distinct ideas is a complex topic in the history of religion.¹

A modest but productive place to start this analysis is with linguistic evidence. There are several roots in biblical Hebrew that give rise to words corresponding to 'hope' in European languages. The main ones are *ḡhl* (גַּחַל) and *kvh* (קָוָה). Let us explore their semantic field. The first, *ḡhl*, conveys primarily the sense of waiting, of expectation. Although there are no definite cognates outside of biblical Hebrew, a possible association is the south-Arabic word for 'being undecided'.² The root suggests an orientation towards an uncertain future, perhaps

¹ A superb study of enduring articulations of life in the face of death within the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament may be found in Kevin J. Madigan and Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection: The Power of God for Christians and Jews* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2008).

² Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *A Bilingual Dictionary of the Hebrew and Aramaic Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 377. For a thorough etymological, grammatical, and semantic discussion, see G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, trans. John T. Willis, 15 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1974), vi. 49–55.

with a positive expectation. Thus, Noah ‘waited (*va-yahel*) another seven days and again sent out the dove from the ark’ (Gen. 8: 10).³ ‘He [Saul] waited seven days, the time Samuel had set’ (1 Sam. 13: 8). Isaiah prophesies that God’s servant will establish the true way on earth and that ‘the coastlands shall await his teaching’ (Isa. 42: 4). The psalmist encourages the faithful: ‘Be strong and of good courage, all you who wait for the LORD’ (Ps. 31: 25). In all of these instances (and many more could be adduced), the emphasis is more on waiting than on hoping, although an attitude of hope is already implied by the stance of positive expectation. Noah waits (but also hopes, one presumes) for the waters to recede. Those who wait for God also hope for his coming. None the less, to the extent that these moments can be separated, the most basic meaning of *yhl* seems to be positive expectation, waiting, rather than hope per se. One might say that the root meaning is secular or natural, as opposed to substantively religious, but even this is probably misleading. Waiting for a future event or state in a universe ruled by a providential God is different from waiting in an absurd, contingent universe, as pictured by Samuel Beckett, Bertrand Russell, or Albert Camus. Waiting in God’s world cannot be neatly separated from trusting, hoping, or praying.

Waiting thus necessarily runs into hoping, given the world-pictures at work in the Israelite universe. Enriching the sense of waiting or expectancy with a more determinate sense of hope are such passages as Micah 5: 6: ‘The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people, like dew from the LORD, like droplets on grass—which do not look to any man nor place their hope (*lo yiyahel*) in mortals’ or Psalms 42: 12: ‘Why so downcast, my soul, why disquieted within me? Have hope in God; I will yet praise him, my ever-present help, my God’.⁴ There is thus an implicit ethics of hope. One ought not to hope, Micah implies, in human beings. Only certain ‘objects’, in this case God, are worthy of our hopes. Hope is an existential investment in divine Being or in a project secured by the divine Being. ‘Put not your trust in the great,’ the Psalms assert, ‘in mortal man who cannot save’ (Ps. 146: 3; see also Ps. 147: 10–11). Those who invest their hope in other than God’s purposes will have their hopes defeated.

³ All translations from the Hebrew Scriptures, unless otherwise indicated, are from the Jewish Publication Society Tanakh translation, as found in Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (eds.), *The Jewish Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁴ This coda concludes Psalm 43 as well.

The faithful should not place their hope in mortals, but only in God. But what if God is not helping but ostensibly hurting his people? What if he is punishing them? Can one still hope in God under these circumstances? In the cycle of Elisha stories, the king of Israel realizes that God is the source of his misfortune: ‘this calamity is from the LORD. What more can I hope for from the LORD?’ he asks despondently (2 Kgs 6: 33). If God turns against him, there is nothing left to hope for. His very realization that God is shaping events, however, is accepted by God as a kind of repentance. God acknowledges his repentance and offers him new grounds to hope for his future. Hope ought to drill deeply. When there is ostensibly nothing left to hope for, one can always hope for a change of heart. One can hope to become a creature deserving of God’s forgiveness. A hopeful future, however unlikely, is never absurd for the believer. Thus, given a God worthy of our hope, hope should be inexhaustible. We should never cease to be able to hope.

Such an attitude—such insulation from falsifiability—might consign hope to complete irrationality, however. The Book of Proverbs gestures towards this possibility, towards an almost Greek sense of the irrationality of hope, when it asserts that ‘hope (*tohelet*) deferred sickens the heart, but desire realized is a tree of life’ (Prov. 13: 12). This book of rather secular wisdom offers a realistic assessment of the risks of hope. However, if hope is a virtue and if virtue is in some way ordered by reason, then hope, tamed by reason, is not indiscriminate. Hope must have rationally defensible or articulable grounds. The book most nearly approximating a philosophical dialogue in the Bible, Job, seems to confront this possibility—namely, that one may discern conditions under which it is madness to hope; when hope really is lost. Job defiantly asserts (Job 13: 15): ‘He may well slay me; I may have no hope; yet I will argue my case before him.’⁵ Whereas the king of Israel (or, more precisely, his messenger) in the 2 Kings text cited above saw no hope for the future once God had turned against him, Job, a model of probity, believes that even without hope he must yet have his integrity.⁶ He will argue with God, even though God slays him.

⁵ This translation is controversial and relies on the written (*ketiv*) form of the word *lo* (taking it, as written, as ‘not’) rather than the traditional Jewish oral pronunciation (*qere*) of *lo*, meaning ‘in him’ as in: ‘Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him.’

⁶ Job’s interlocutor, Eliphaz, at another point in the text, assures Job that his integrity is his hope (‘Is not your piety your confidence, your integrity your hope?’ Job 4: 6). The

Whereas most of our texts suggest that there is always a space for, a chance for, hope, Job suggests that there is an end to hope after which comes not the end but a kind of nobility, here integrity, even under the most straitened circumstances. For Job, unlike much of the rest of the Bible, hope is not always in order. (The boldness of Job's criticisms of the received biblical wisdom led to the sages of the Talmud questioning whether Job was a Jew or a pagan.⁷ Here, indeed, Job sounds more like a pagan, who rejects the virtue of hope, than an Israelite.)

Indeed, hope can be wrecked. Belief in an omniscient, omnipotent, and omni-benevolent God—if these terms are not too anachronistic to apply to the God of the Hebrew Scriptures—does not underwrite a universe where all hopes are fulfilled. Often this God (for sometimes intelligible, sometimes inscrutable, reasons) brings his creatures, even his beloved ones, to grief. We read in Ezekiel 19: 5 of a lioness, a symbol of the Jewish people, whose cubs, which symbolize the kings of Judah, are destroyed one by one: 'When she saw herself frustrated, her hope defeated, she took another of her cubs and set him up as a great beast.' In the symbolism of this passage, the Jewish people try to renew their hope and secure anew their future but God will frustrate their plans. The hope renewed through the lioness's own agency is a false, illusory hope. God will not allow it. Hope, to be firm, must be fixed on proper objects. To put it in terms of the virtues: the disposition to hope must be part of an ensemble of morally and spiritually appropriate character traits.

Unlike the lioness, whose hope is in pure defiance of God, the author of Lamentations struggles to restore a hope that has withered along with the feeling of divine abandonment. This hope, however, will stand because it is linked to recognition of divine justice. Hope will be restored by the exertions of human repentance.

He has broken my teeth on gravel,
Has ground me into the dust.
My life was bereft of peace,

force of this remark seems to be that given Job's virtuous life of piety and integrity he should know better. God is just and treats the just in a just manner. That had been Job's own confidence and hope. The fact that Job is suffering now means merely that he had sinned and that God was treating him appropriately. Job should accept that the moral order of the universe is still rationally perspicuous and intact.

⁷ See the extensive Talmudic discussion of Job in B. Baba Batra 15a–16b.

I forgot what happiness was.
 I thought that my strength and hope
 Had perished before the LORD.
 To recall my distress and my misery
 Was wormwood and poison;
 Whenever I thought of them,
 I was bowed low.
 But this do I call to mind,
 Therefore I have hope:
 The kindness of the LORD has not ended,
 His mercies are not spent.

(Lam. 3: 16–22)

As a human emotion, hope is frail and always prone to be misguided.⁸ But, when one remembers and understands the covenantal fidelity (*hesed*) of God, one emplaces hope in an appropriate axiological and ontological context. Hope is restored. In so far as one ought to remember God's *hesed* and mercy (*rahamin*), one ought to hope even when, from a purely human point of view, despair seems more in order. To practise faith in God is to cultivate and sustain hope in God. Faith inaugurates a duty to hope. Where there is faith, then, there are always good grounds to hope. This is not to say that there are always good grounds to believe that specific hopes, in the sense of specific wishes, may be granted. That is not what the Bible means by either faith or hope. It is to say that faith orients the faithful towards an ultimate confidence in God, which despite whatever happens to the faithful, can help them rise inwardly above all present calamity.⁹

⁸ For an example of a misguided or depraved hope, see Job 6: 8. Job's hope is for his own destruction, which God fails to grant, see also Job 8: 13: 'Such is the fate of all who forget God; the hope of the impious man comes to naught—whose confidence is a thread of gossamer, whose trust is a spider's web.'

⁹ The view that biblical faith is or ought to be immune from disconfirmation by the calamitous events of history is roundly rejected by the Jewish philosophical theologian Emil Fackenheim. Fackenheim, whose work is marked by a protracted struggle with the implications of the Holocaust for Jewish faith, rejects a spiritual orientation that presumes to rise above history; that, correspondingly, decouples God from history. The Holocaust really can—but, in the end, should not—disconfirm the biblical God. The only reason it should not do so is because in the midst of the Holocaust some Jews were able to resist, to continue to affirm Jewish being. That historical actuality makes faith in God post-Holocaust a historical possibility. See Emil Fackenheim, *To Mend the World* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982). I am sympathetic to Fackenheim's project but I do not think that the case has been made on behalf of the presumed historicity of consciousness as much as Fackenheim, a Hegelian in method here, seems to believe.

Faith as unshakeable confidence in the goodness, justice, and providence of God may function, in a sense, like *apatheia* for the Stoics, that is, as a strategy of transcendence that makes one immune to hardship. It is substantively different, however. Stoic and other Greek theories or therapies for the transcendence of suffering are based on a metaphysics—a reasoned view of what reality is which, in turn, gives rise to a reasoned view of how to cope with it. The biblical norm of sturdy confidence in the fundamental goodness, justice, and providence of God is not grounded in rational reflection on the nature of the universe as such but on experience of God as a person who can be trusted. That at least is how the biblical narrative unfolds. Events of encounter give rise to rational reflection, not vice versa. Abraham is addressed by God and comes to trust him. (In a famous post-biblical midrash, however, Abraham first reasons his way to the necessary existence of the one God. Rationality prepares him for encounter.¹⁰ The midrash reflects, no doubt, Judaism's own encounter with the philosophical climate of the Hellenistic world.) Moses trusts God, in their encounter at the burning bush, because he can recall encounters with the patriarchs. Narratives of encounter rather than arguments about beings fix the context in which hope is possible and warranted.¹¹ A phrase used several times in the Psalms (e.g., Pss. 33: 18; 147: 11) describes true Israelites as those who hope for God's covenantal fidelity (*m'yaholim l'hasdo*).¹² They can hope for it because they have already experienced it. God's *hesed* already underlies their personal and collective experience; its full flourishing will define, they hope, their future. To hope is to know the *hesed* of God, as it was, is and will be.

Thus, just as the psalmist encourages himself and Israel to have hope, there are also texts that encourage God to make good on the grant of hope. Israel calls out to the God whom it has encountered and asks its divine partner to confirm its faith. God has given Israel hope; now God should certify that the hope was well placed.

¹⁰ See Bereshit Rabba, ch. 39: midrash 1.

¹¹ The strain of Jewish philosophy that stresses the experiential over the ratiocinative runs from Yehuda Halevi through such moderns as Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Eliezer Berkovits, and David Novak (see esp. Eliezer Berkovits, *God, Man and History* (Jerusalem: Shalem Press, 2004), 12–31, for a concise statement of the alleged deficiencies of reason vis-à-vis the confirming power of experience). The artificial dichotomy of 'reason' vs 'experience' has always struck me as too hasty. None the less, the dichotomy, misleading as it is, has a point.

¹² See also Pss. 31: 25, 33: 22, 69: 4 for variations.

Remember Your word to Your servant
 Through which You have given me hope.
 This is my comfort in my affliction,
 That Your promise has preserved me . . .
 I long for Your deliverance;
 I hope for Your word.

(Ps. 119: 49–50, 81)

Here hope flows into prayer. The psalmist begs God to remember his hope-inducing word. God must act to deliver or to be present. God must confirm, as the psalmist's and Israel's partner, that he is a living and trustworthy God. The encounter that initiates the ground of hope can and must be renewed. The narration of past moments of encounter is insufficient although, under the circumstances of history, it may be the best that the faithful can do.

To endure in hope throughout history is a gift of God. Hope is in itself a valued or virtuous state. Hope brings us into God's presence; none the less, we also hope for things that that presence can provide. Grammatically, the verb *hope* usually, but not always, takes an object.¹³ On balance, hope is not an end in itself. If we think of hope as a virtue, we recall that virtue is both an end (in the sense of an intrinsic excellence) and also a means. In Aristotle's account virtue, like everything else, is purposive; its purpose is to make us good. We cannot become good without acting virtuously. We act virtuously not only because it is right but because it uniquely conduces to our becoming good. In the Hebrew Scriptures, although hope is in itself a kind of blessedness, it is none the less instrumental. It orients us towards God's promise, deliverance, and wisdom. It is a holy means to a holy end.

More numerous than words derived from *yhl* are words deriving from *kvh*. A noun form of this root, *tikvah*, remains the principal word for hope in Modern Hebrew, as well as the name of the State of Israel's national anthem. (Another noun form, *mikveh*, was, as part of the phrase, Mikveh Israel (the hope of Israel) a popular name for synagogues throughout the Diaspora, including the historic colonial synagogue of Philadelphia.¹⁴) Cognates in other Semitic languages, as well as other related Hebrew words, are 'thread' (as in the famous crimson

¹³ See the discussion of 'absolute' or 'non-object-oriented' uses of *yhl* in Botterweck and Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vi. 52–3. Such instances include Ps. 71: 14, Lam. 3: 21, Job 6: 11 and possibly 119: 49.

¹⁴ The phrase is found in Jer. 14: 8, 17: 13. See also Jer. 50: 7 for a variant.

thread that the harlot Rahab was to hang from her window in Jericho to alert the invading Israelites that she was a collaborator (Josh. 2: 18)), ‘spider’s web’, and ‘cord’, as well as verbs meaning ‘endure’, ‘await’, and ‘be tense’. The root may suggest, therefore, a posture of waiting or expectancy but with more at stake than in the case of words deriving from *yhl*. Here, there is not just an outlook on the future but a tense or energetic anticipation of it. The relation to the future is like a cord stretched to a point of tension, yet the cord does not break. The heightened emotional coloration of the root better indicates dimensions of hoping, such as investment and vulnerability, than does mere expectation. Whereas *yhl* has its share of ‘secular’ uses, more than half of the occurrences of *kvh* have God as the object of the verb.¹⁵ Where hope (developed from *kvh*) is not hope in God but in human beings, the accent is negative: such hopes are doomed to disappointment.¹⁶

Words derived from *kvh* are more ‘religious’ than ‘secular’ in accent, if such a distinction is allowed. Among the more ‘secular’ uses are the following. In the chapter of Job following the one cited above, we read ‘There is hope (*tikvah*) for a tree; if it is cut down it will renew itself; its shoots will not cease’ (Job 14: 7). The natural renewal of plants and the cultivated renewal of hope are analogized again in Hosea 2: 16–17: ‘Assuredly, I will speak coaxingly to her and lead her through the wilderness and speak to her tenderly. I will give her her vineyards from there, and the Valley of Achor as a plowland of hope.’ (The last phrase, *petah tikvah*, more standardly translated as a door or gateway of hope, was taken by Jews in the 1870s for the name of an agricultural village in Israel’s coastal plain.) Although hope in some ways resembles a natural process—perennial renewal occurs seemingly of itself—it is, in actuality, a divine grant. Both the bestowal of the good, which hope intends, and the possibility of hoping for them in the first place are divine gifts, not a natural process. A seemingly ‘secular’ use points towards a ‘religious’ application.

Hope does not come naturally. God allows Israel to hope by strengthening it against despair.

A cry is heard in Ramah—
Wailing, bitter weeping—

¹⁵ However, for a rather neutral, secular use of *kvh*, see Ruth 1: 12.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Ps. 69: 21. God’s hope is also disappointed when He expects justice from human beings. Cf. Isaiah 5: 7.

Rachel weeping for her children.
 She refuses to be comforted
 For her children, who are gone.
 Thus said the LORD:
 Restrain your voice from weeping,
 Your eyes from shedding tears;
 For there is a reward for your labor
 —declares the LORD:
 They shall return from the enemy's land.
 And there is hope (tikvah) for your future
 —declares the LORD.

(Jer. 31: 15–17)

It is right to hope for a future when God insures that there is a moral order to the world; that labour will be rewarded and restoration accomplished. Hope is possible because justice is possible; justice is possible because of God. 'Not always shall the needy be ignored, nor the hope of the afflicted forever lost. Rise, O LORD! Let not men have power . . .' (Ps. 9: 19–20a). Here hope does not float above history as the Hebraic equivalent of *apatheia*. It is firmly anchored in the possibility of justice; of the righting of historic wrongs. But, what if the wrongs are not made right in our time, in our lifetime? Should the seemingly endless deferral of justice count against hope? Here, once again, hope is inextricable from faith and from trust. The faithful must quiet their agitated minds and seek reassurance from its deepest source: 'Truly, wait quietly for God, O my soul, for my hope comes from Him' (Ps. 62: 6). Hope in God requires trust in God: 'For You are my hope, O LORD God, my trust from my youth. While yet unborn, I depended on You' (Ps. 71: 5–6a).¹⁷

Once again, in Job, the Bible questions its own 'postulate' of an ever-available, divinely proffered experience of hope. For Job, hope, like God, can sometimes hide its face. Hope, if available at all, can be feckless. It can suffer with the sufferer; it can go into exile like God. In a particularly painful lament, Job cries:

My days are done, my tendons severed,
 The strings of my heart.
 They say that night is day,
 That light is here—in the face of darkness.

¹⁷ See, e.g., Ps. 25: 2–3; Ps. 40: 2–4. 'Hope' is paired with the verb for trust (*bth*).

If I must look forward to Sheol as my home,
 And make my bed in the dark place,
 Say to the Pit, 'You are my father',
 To the maggots, 'Mother', 'Sister'—
 Where, then, is my hope?
 Who can see hope for me?
 Will it descend to Sheol?
 Shall we go down together to the dust?

(Job 17: 11–16)

In the typical manner of biblical poetry, hope is reified into a putative entity which can descend to Sheol with the speaker. Hope will accompany Job, pathetically, into the dust. The sad reality of abandonment is all that Job can look forward to (literally, 'hope' for).¹⁸ Job's readiness to abandon hope and accuse God of failing him led some ancient Jewish sages to see Job as a wicked blasphemer rather than as a model of authenticity or probity, as we tend to view him in modernity.¹⁹

Hope, of course, did not abandon or disappoint Job. After the theophany in chapters 40–1, Job recants and in the prose epilogue the Lord restored Job's fortunes. After 140 years, Job died 'old and contented' (Job 42: 17). It was wrong of Job to believe that his hope had died; that he and hope had no recourse but to descend to Sheol together. Nothing is too marvellous for God, the text seems to say, whether the awesome project of creation or the final project of restoration.

One of the most memorable symbols of hope fulfilled in the Hebrew Scriptures is Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezek. 37). The prophet sees a plain or valley full of desiccated bones. He is commanded to speak over them and tell them that God will knit them together with sinew, flesh, and skin into bodies once again and fill them with breath and they will live. As Ezekiel speaks, this happens. Although later generations of Jews interpreted this text as a basis for the belief in the resurrection of the dead, in context the meaning is

¹⁸ The word translated here as 'look forward', *'akaveh*, derives, as does *tikvati*, my hope, in v. 14, from *kvh*. This leads in the Hebrew not only to assonance but to an intricate layering of meanings. It doesn't make sense, in English, to say 'If I must hope for Sheol as my home' (hence, the translation 'look forward') but the reader of Hebrew would be aware of the overall range of meaning of the word. See the discussion at Botterweck and Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary*, vii. 568.

¹⁹ See the extended discussion on Job in B. Baba Batra 15a–16b.

probably more symbolic than literal. Lest anyone fail to grasp it, God makes the meaning clear:

And He said to me, ‘O mortal, these bones are the whole House of Israel. They say, “Our bones are dried up, our hope is gone; we are doomed”. Prophecy, therefore, and say to them: Thus said the Lord God: I am going to open your graves and lift you out of the graves, O My people, and bring you to the land of Israel. You shall know, O My people, that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and lifted you out of your graves. I will put My breath into you and you shall live again, and I will set you upon your own soil. Then you shall know that I the LORD have spoken and have acted’—declares the LORD. (Ezek. 37: 11–14)

His people want to abandon hope, but God does not let them. The people say *’avdah tikvatenu*: ‘our hope is lost!’ (Significantly, in our time the Jewish people reply to their despondent ancestors: *’od lo avdah tikvatenu*—‘our hope is still *not* lost!’ These words are part of the State of Israel’s national anthem, *Ha-tikvah*, the hope.)

One of the main points that I wish to draw from this review of sources is that biblical hope points in two directions.²⁰ As I argued in Chapter 1, hope is both a fundamental orientation within the present and an anticipation of a desired future. Hope undergirds a life of increased depth in the present and it expects a life of both individual

²⁰ For a text that illustrates hope as an orientation in the present and as an orientation toward the future, consider Ps. 33: 16–22:

Kings are not delivered by a large force;
warriors are not saved by great strength;
horses are a false hope for deliverance;
for all their great power they provide no escape.
Truly the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him,
who wait for His faithful care
to save them from death,
to sustain them in famine.
We set our hope on the LORD,
He is our help and shield;
in him our hearts rejoice,
for in His holy name we trust.
May we enjoy, O LORD, Your faithful care,
As we have put our hope in You.

Here, the psalmist hopes for future deliverance (from death, from famine) and also experiences the joy and security which that hope secures in the present. To put one’s hope in God means to experience his *hesed* (‘faithful care’) now as well as to anticipate its full flowering in times to come. (Note, as well, the contrast with true hope, in God, and false hope, in horses as a means of deliverance.)

and collective fulfilment in the future. Both present and future are crucial. In the present, hope strengthens a way of life oriented towards confidence in and trusting reliance on God, that is, a life of faith. Hope in the present is coordinate with fortitude and courage to withstand (or alleviate) suffering. It correlates with gratitude for life, despite its hardships. It intuits a link between the human experience of life and a transcendent source of sacred meaning that orients and informs the human experience of life. Hope, as a quality of life lived in the present, endows life with both depth and transcendence; it enhances the vertical axis of life. In this sense a biblical, and subsequently a Jewish or a Christian, life lived in hope is a life of communion with God, of courage and confidence, of awareness of the sacred. The present participates in eternity, where eternity does not—cannot—mean ‘a very long time’ but rather ‘the deepest meaning of experience in this moment such that something of this moment and its meaning cannot die’.²¹

Biblical hope also points towards the future. It awaits or anticipates the fulfilment of the promises of God in concrete time. Hope, in this sense, moves along a horizontal axis. The prophetic books, which are replete with expressions of hope, offer assurances of future revival, restoration, and renewal. The destroyed Northern Kingdom of Israel will be returned from exile. A righteous king of the House of David will rule over a united people, secure in their land. Or God himself will be king; all the nations will worship him and laud Israel as his true, no-longer-suffering servant. The knowledge of God will fill the world and wickedness will cease. Even the cruelties of nature will cease, as lions lie down with lambs and harvests will forever be abundant.²² Hope along this dimension directs the gaze to a mysteriously deferred future, inviting speculation about when and how it will arrive. But it also feeds back into the current of life lived in the present, for, in the ethical monotheism of prophetic religion, the moral character of life in the present influences the course of history in the future. Repentance and return to the faithful way of life *now* can mean (not mechanically, of

²¹ For a systematic use of this sense of ‘eternity’ as temporal depth in the present, see Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. Barbara E. Galli (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), pt III: bk I. For a scholarly discussion of Rosenzweig’s use of eternity and time, see Peter Eli Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Between Judaism and German Philosophy* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2003).

²² The extent to which God will transform or merely tame nature in the end time is a topic of rabbinic discussion. See, e.g., *Sifra Behukotai*, ch. 2.

course) a shorter time until *then*. 'Prayer, repentance, and charity', as the Jewish prayer book for the High Holy Days puts it, 'can avert the severe decree'.

The dual orientation of hope to present and future, now and then, correlates with a polarity in biblical religion and, subsequently, in Judaism and Christianity. The orientation towards the present—hope as an affirmative quality of life lived now—underwrites the formation of a comprehensive, sacred way of life. A hopeful life, a serious life lived in communion with God, must be structured so as to express the deepest commitments of faith at every turn. Life must be, as it were, full and complete in the present even though it cannot truly be full and complete until the anticipated future fulfilment. Life must be structured in a sacramental manner, where every moment is an occasion for communion with the divine. Every moment, properly perceived, is a *nunc stans*, an opening onto eternity. From this point of view, post-biblical or, more precisely, rabbinic Judaism, for example, is not primarily a messianic religion (its centre of gravity is not expectation of future deliverance) but rather an orientation towards sacralizing the present. The future directedness of Jewish hope is not sacrificed, to be sure, but neither does it dominate the hopeful consciousness. A sacred mode of life in the present, a life of depth and transcendence, is as much the fruit of hope as is anticipation of a glorious future.²³

²³ This is the general view of Jacob Neusner who argues that rabbinic Judaism, as it emerged in the first century CE and afterwards, represents a turning away from messianism and towards the construction of 'a new life beyond history'. See Jacob Neusner, *Messiah in Context* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1984), 12. Neusner shows how the foundation document of early Judaism, the Mishnah, neglects the mythic-symbolic complex of ideas associated with the messiah and its attendant theme of future salvation in favour of a present-oriented sacred 'regularity' as a way of coping with history. Sanctification, not salvation, is the dominant thrust of mishnaic Judaism. The picture is complicated by the Babylonian Talmud, in which greater play is given to the 'messiah myth', but that too is domesticated, in comparison with the earlier messianism in Jewish apocryphal literature, by the mishnaic world view. Neusner writes: 'In the hands of the framers of the norm-setting literature of Judaism, the Messiah serves to keep things pretty much as they were, while at the same time promising dramatic change' (p. 177). What Israel must do is show loyalty to the teachings and practices of the Torah in the present in order to prove worthy of future redemption. The systematic diminution of emphasis on future-oriented messianism found in Neusner and his students' work contrasts with older, mostly Christian scholarship that portrayed 'late' Judaism as a messianic project similar to (but not as successful as) Christianity. See, e.g., Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, trans. G. W. Anderson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956) in such chapters as 'The Early

Both biblical and post-biblical religion knows of a tension or complementarity between a future and a present-focused orientation. Biblical religion has been fruitfully analysed by the Harvard scholar, Jon Levenson, in terms of categories denominated by two sacred mountains: Sinai and Zion.²⁴ Sinai indicates the covenant of God with Moses and the people Israel. This covenant establishes an enduring relationship between God and Israel, as well as a framework within which the divine-human encounter can continue to be lived. As Judaism understands that covenant, the life of fidelity to God's commandments (*mitzvot*), as lived in the present, is a life with the God who revealed himself at Sinai. A life lived within the Sinai covenant is not about salvation per se; it is about sacralization. It is about being holy in so far as God is holy. Life made faithful to the Sinai covenant—life lived according to the Torah—is about the fundamental affirmation of the here and now, of present relationships between man and God (*bein adam l'makom*) and between man and man (*bein adam l'havero*). The past—history—is prologue; the mitzvot are 'the end of history'.²⁵ The Sinai covenant precedes politics and transcends the grip of history. It locates hope in the present possibility of communion with the covenanting God. None the less, it also projects an image of perfect covenantal harmony onto the distant horizon of the future. As Levenson puts it, 'Covenant is not only something lived, but something hoped for, the teleological end of creation and history. Sinai is the model of cosmic harmony, and the relationship of Israel and YHWH, the prototype of redeemed life'.²⁶ The covenant allows the Jews to live in history but to be, in a sense, above or beyond history. To be meta-historical is to be mindful that there is a lord of history and that this lord is 'close to all who call upon him' (Ps. 145:18) at every moment.

Zion, by contrast, stands for the covenant made between God and King David, which inaugurated the past and future rule of a righteous

Jewish Future Hope' (ch. 5) or 'The Eschatology of Later Judaism' (ch. 8) (although note Mowinckel's qualification of messianism in rabbinic texts (p. 340)). For an extension of Neusner's project, see Jacob Neusner, William S. Green, and Ernest Frerichs (eds.), *Judaisms and their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), where Green argues that 'the model of an Israelite-Judaic tradition driven by "future hope" is finally unpersuasive' (p. 10).

²⁴ Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (San Francisco, Calif.: Harper San Francisco, 1987).

²⁵ *Ibid.* 43.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 79.

scion of the House of David. It is the Zion covenant that imparts a strongly future-oriented dimension to Israelite and subsequently Jewish (and Christian) faith. Whereas Sinai underwrites a sacramental framework within the present, Zion anticipates the future fulfilment of divine promises of righteous rule, historical consummation, universal justice and peace. Sinai also had its projection on the future. Zion, however, paints the future with a more strongly political palette. Zion leads us into a reckoning with present history and politics, viewed from the anticipation of a perfected or completed history and politics. Sinai leads us into a way of life founded on encounter with God in the depth of the present moment. Zion leads us into work for or anticipation of an empowered and restored Davidic kingdom. Sinai's redemption lay in the past; in the exodus. Zion's redemption lies in the future, in the restoration of the House of David. Sinai's impulse is primarily conservative. Zion's impulse is primarily restorative or even utopian.²⁷

Zion entails much more, however. Zion, let us not forget, is also the mountain of the Temple. Zion's emphasis on righteous rule, on the political, is inextricable from its own version of the sacred—a holy mountain where Israel, indeed the world, and God meet in the liturgy. Whereas Sinai as such had and has no sacredness for Jews, Zion as such was and remains holy. Zion represents the appropriation and endurance of an archetypal mythos of the cosmic mountain, an axis mundi where the human and the ultimate meet. The Temple—for whose physical restoration traditional Jews and some Christians continue to pray—becomes a symbol for an ideal future life. The 'world to come' of the rabbis (*olam ha-ba*) is equated, by Maimonides, with 'the Temple of the Lord'.²⁸ The yearning for a restoration of the perfection of life within the Temple fuels future-oriented expectation in rabbinic Judaism.

Biblical religion is not a religion of either Sinai or Zion; it is a religion of both. These categories are analytically useful in teasing out different strains of biblical thought but they are already largely fused in our biblical texts. And, in the end, the Jew and the Christian inherited

²⁷ For the delineation of three tendencies—conservative, restorative, and utopian—as factors in Jewish eschatology, see Gershom Scholem, 'Toward an Understanding of the Messianic Idea in Judaism', *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 3.

²⁸ Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 182–3 (citing Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, H. Teshuvah 8: 4).

both. Both biblical traditions have their versions of the future; both have their imperatives for the present. One can, however, locate relatively different emphases. The texts of literary prophecy from the eighth century BCE onwards primarily invoke the covenant of Zion. The austere moral judgement of the prophets on the present state of affairs in Israel or Judah is based on comparison with the ideal state of affairs represented by righteous kingship. (None the less, the moral particulars of righteous rule, in terms of which the present is so deficient, are also derived from the Sinai covenant. Jeremiah, for example, is relentless in his criticism of the current House of David based on a moral vocabulary drawn from the Book of Deuteronomy, a core text of the Sinai tradition.) The Zion covenant builds on but does not displace the Sinai covenant.²⁹ Zion foregrounds the Temple and the holiness it brings into the midst of Israel as well as the demands such holiness generate. Sinai gives a comprehensive medium for realizing the holiness that the Temple requires. Both traditions cope with past, present, and future. Both have their versions of meta-historical eternity—for example, the mitzvot given to all Israel or the grant of Jerusalem and everlasting rule given to the House of David.

The most future-oriented crystallization of hope in the Hebrew Scriptures is to be found in texts drawn from the Zion tradition, such as prophetic literature and royal psalms. Although explicit messianic vocabulary is sparse in the Hebrew Scriptures, these texts provide the basis for the eventual development of a more robust messianism in both Judaism and Christianity. Messianism—a focus on a single figure or in rabbinic Judaism a pair of figures who inaugurate the ultimate divine rule over history—is a subset of the larger orientation towards the future known as eschatology. The Hebrew Scriptures envision at least four distinct frameworks of eschatological belief.³⁰ The first framework envisions that the coming eschatological fulfilment will grow directly out of the present historical situation. The end is imminent. This view is represented by much of the book of Isaiah, with the exception of Isaiah 24–7 and 40–66. Particularly noteworthy here are the prophecies of Isaiah 7: 14–17 ('Look, the

²⁹ Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 99.

³⁰ See Benjamin Uffenheimer, 'From Prophetic to Apocalyptic Eschatology', in Henning Graf Reventlow (ed.), *Eschatology in the Bible and in Jewish and Christian Tradition* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 200–17.

young woman is with child and about to give birth to a son. Let her name him Immanuel'); Isaiah 9: 1–6 ('The people that walked in darkness have seen a brilliant light . . . For a child has been born to us, a son has been given us'); and Isaiah 11 ('But a shoot shall grow out of the stump of Jesse, a twig shall sprout from his stock . . .'). These passages, especially Isaiah 11: 6–9, envision not only deliverance from the present danger of Assyrian conquest and the re-establishment of a righteous Davidic kingdom but a utopian transformation of the entire natural and political order. They are the basis for much subsequent Christian messianism, where the child to whom the prophet alludes is associated with Jesus.

The second framework, a polar opposite of the first, holds that the end is completely detached from the present; the end is far off, beyond any process of history altogether. The prophecies in both Isaiah 24–7 and Ezekiel are the main representatives of this view. God will enter history and reveal his presence, which all will acknowledge (Isa. 25: 6). He will destroy not only the rule of wicked, but death itself (Isaiah 25: 8). In a trans-historical manner, the dry bones of the House of Israel will rise to life (Ezek. 37). Both these texts and the ones in the first framework, in their utopianism, undergird the various metaphysically inflated views of the future to be found in the Jewish and the Christian traditions.

The third view, represented mainly by Deutero-Isaiah (Isa. 40–66), identifies contemporary history with eschatology: the End has *arrived*, e.g. in the proclamation by the Persian king Cyrus that the Jews may return to their land (Ezra 1–4). Deutero-Isaiah refers, famously, to Cyrus as *mashiah*, 'anointed one' (Isa. 45: 1). It is not a Jewish king who is the messiah, but a gentile. God is creating a new reality now; the new things (Isa. 42: 9, 43: 19, 48: 6) will exceed the former things; a new heaven and a new earth (Isa. 65: 17) will eclipse the old one. This view, an urgent realized eschatology, is the most unstable of the four, immediately leading to disappointment within the same body of prophecy (see, for example, Isa. 63: 1–6).³¹

Unlike the three previous frameworks where the bearing of human action on eschatology is uncertain, the fourth view invokes the need

³¹ Uffenheimer writes: 'Nevertheless, some prophecies, particularly those in chs. 56–66, exude a certain pessimism, an air of disappointment. Contrary to the prophet's soaring expectations, he realizes that the forces of evil have not disappeared; the world continues to go its way.' *Ibid.* 212.

for deliberate human agency. In the post-exilic prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah, the demand is made to complete the rebuilding of the Temple (Hag. 1) and to crown Zerubabel as the messianic king of Judah (Hag. 2: 21–3; Zech. 4: 6–10). These texts underwrite the tradition of active messianism, which is always a threat to the established order. The subsequent career of messianism in Judaism reveals a tense interplay between active and passive understandings of the relationship of human action to eschatological consummation. Within the Bible itself, however, the failure of Haggai and Zechariah's programme leads to the decline of biblical prophecy altogether and its replacement by apocalyptic speculation, in which no human action is productive of the end of days. Eschatology becomes, henceforth, a matter of esoteric calculation detached from human agency. This is the dominant mode of post-biblical non-canonical literature, as well as of the late biblical book of Daniel.³² Against the passive posture of calculation, speculation, and waiting, there will be occasional eruptions of subterranean human activity to realize the eschaton (as in the Hasmonean revolt or the later revolt of the Zealots against the Romans), as well as a pervasive de-emphasis on messianism altogether. In the latter mode, which becomes typical of rabbinic Judaism, the life of fidelity to the commandments ('Sinai') displaces both activity on behalf of and anxious expectation of eschatological redemption. Sinai, so to speak, reasserts itself against Zion, or against the political rather than the cultic thrust of Zion.

The Hebrew Bible's teaching on hope is thus multilayered and complex. Both present and future are loci of hope. Hope has the qualities of a virtue, as well as of a way of wisdom. Hope ratifies the faith and trust that spring from an encounter with ultimacy. Tragedy is

³² The scholarly literature on apocalypticism is vast. Having been either ignored or marginalized for much of the nineteenth century, twentieth-century scholars began to study the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical books in which post-biblical apocalypses are found with greater awareness of their own theological and ideological biases. The discovery of apocalyptic texts in the sectarian library discovered at Qumran further spurred the study of this literature. For a mid-century assessment of the theological and ideological contexts in which Christians approached apocalypticism, see the introduction by George Wesley Buchanan to R. H. Charles, *Eschatology: The Doctrine of a Future Life* (New York: Schocken Books, 1963). For an astute discussion of the status of apocalypticism in Jewish scholarship of the late nineteenth to late twentieth centuries, see David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), ch. 7.

not the final word. Our innumerable personal hopes may die, but a great hope remains and will be fulfilled in the fullness of time. The wisdom of this great hope is sensed in the depth of the present moment, when the faithful know that their lives are supported by a wholly good God, of whom little may be stated. The faithful can only point to the mystery that envelops both him and those who turn towards him. They know, at most, that there is a life beyond tragedy; that the world can become a fit habitation for their personal and collective projects; and that those projects, if righteous, are in accord with the deepest character of the world. Despair, the turning in impotent rage from the world and its abnegation as a fit habitation constitutes a betrayal of the one they sense that they have met and hope that they can serve.

Hope in Early Judaism

Given this biblical and post-biblical background, what can we say about hope within the context of rabbinic Judaism?³³ What did (or do, since this is *mutatis mutandis* an ongoing tradition) rabbinic Jews hope for? Can we find the same relative oscillation between present-oriented and future-oriented expressions of hope or between highly affirmative evaluations of the redemptive potency of human action and quietist rejections of human action in the rabbinic universe that we find in biblical and post-biblical Judaism? Indeed, we can. Ancient rabbinic Judaism, the Judaism of the Mishnah, Talmuds, and other associated writings, displays a dialectical interplay between an emphasis on sacralizing the present and on anticipating the future. Rabbinic literature also gives expression to the poles of apocalyptic passivity—the future is entirely in God’s hands and we can only speculate about its eventual arrival—and to the valorization of human action—redemption and messiah can be quickened by pious Israel. Rabbinic Judaism is heir to the many contradictory and conflated currents of biblical and post-biblical thought and symbolism.

Unlike the Bible, at least in its plain sense, rabbinic Judaism envisages post-mortem reward and punishment—the possibility of spiritual

³³ I restrict this overview to the rabbinic stream of early Judaism in so far as it became the form of Judaism that shaped the dominant, historic mode of subsequent Jewish life.

immortality and blessedness or damnation, at least of minimal duration. These possibilities are underdeveloped in the Bible, pious Jewish exegesis notwithstanding. The rabbis also envision an eventual resurrection of the dead, a possibility explicitly indicated in the latest biblical book, Daniel (cf. Dan. 12: 2), and implicit in prior texts.³⁴ How much weight to give otherworldly reward and punishment (which is a personal matter) vis-à-vis eschatological redemption (which is a collective matter as loci of hope) is not easy to decide. Is rabbinic Judaism primarily a system that focuses on the covenantal relationship between God and Israel, such that the 'religious' preoccupation with personal salvation is, while present, much less significant than the national-collective one? Or is rabbinic Judaism a religion similar in character to Christianity that puts the personal relationship with God and the problem of salvation in the foreground? It is probably uncontroversial to say that the covenantal-collective dimension outweighs the personal dimension in significance. The latter, while not slighted, is less urgent in rabbinic Judaism than in Christianity. The problem of death and eternal life, which seems to shape the religious world of the New Testament to a pronounced degree, is less a factor in the Jewish world, where the destiny of the chosen nation has the greatest salience. Accordingly, although one cannot entirely neglect the supernatural 'world to come' as a locus of early Jewish hope, the main focus of analysis must be on the national restoration or utopian future of the Jewish people as a whole. Although texts about the supernatural 'world to come' are not lacking, the rabbis are more reticent to speculate about such matters than they are about the 'days of the messiah'. Our best mirror of the future, biblical prophecy, they tell us, describes only the days of the messiah. As to the world to come, the 'eye has not seen' it (B. Sanhedrin 99a). Thus, Saadia Gaon, the first great systematizer of rabbinic theology, relies more on rational argument than on rabbinic traditions to depict the conditions of the world to come.³⁵ The rabbis of the exoteric rabbinic canon are epistemologically modest in their claims about the afterlife, at least in comparison with other religious traditions, including the esoteric, mystical dimensions of their own.

³⁴ See, in general, the argument of Jon Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006).

³⁵ Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. Samuel Rosenblatt, Yale Judaica Series (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1948), Treatise IX, chs. 5–11.

Let us turn then to the rich and controversial topic of messianism. The figure of the messiah implies, on its face, an entirely future-directed, anticipatory orientation. But even this is not quite true. The symbol or figure of a messiah has its origins in ancient near eastern sacral kingship. Israelite kingship, 'Zion', developed out of this matrix. The messiah prior to the Babylonian exile was a sacral, anointed king whose purpose was oriented to the present—to ensure cosmic stability in the here and now through righteous rule. (In 1 Sam. 24: 6, for example, David regrets his profane intrusion on the holiness of the person of Saul, 'the Lord's anointed'. The 'messiah', in its most literal signification, is a figure of the here and now.) The Israelites shared this model of sacred kingship (as is evident, for example, in Psalm 2) with their Mesopotamian neighbours. After the destruction of the Israelite and Judean kingdoms and the Babylonian exile, however, the messiah increasingly became a *future* king whose purpose was to restore the ancient splendour. Without present kingship, this was all but inevitable. The present, even the present of a messiah such as the Persian king, Cyrus, disappoints. The messiah moves from 'experience to hope', from present possibility to eschatological datum.³⁶ The more the messiah gets deferred to an ultimate future, an end time, the more the symbol becomes 'mythologized', that is, invested by the religious imagination with supernatural potencies. Redemption in the Hebrew Scriptures does not depend on a messiah, but on God. In post-biblical literature, however, messianism per se plays a larger, more mythological role in the redemptive drama than in the Bible. Even this, however, must not be exaggerated. Recent research shows that the several varieties of ancient Judaism entertained many different redemptive scenarios; not all of them knew of 'a' or 'the' messiah.³⁷

The rabbis give play to eschatological-mythological messiah figures, such as are given the freest rein in the apocalyptic and extra-canonical literatures, and transform and constrain the power of the symbol. The messiah is a symbol, as Jacob Neusner puts it, neither to be neglected nor to be exploited.³⁸ In this he stands on good traditional grounds. Joseph Albo, in a Jewish-Christian disputation called by the pope in

³⁶ Moshe Idel, *Messianic Mystics* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998), 40.

³⁷ For analyses and assessments of the immense variability in the eschatological and messianic orientations of early Judaisms, see the essays collected in Neusner, Green, and Frerichs, *Judaisms and their Messiahs*.

³⁸ Neusner, *Messiah in Context*, 30.

1413, minimized the role of the messiah to such a degree that he exclaimed: 'Posito Messiam mihi probari iam venisse, non putarem deterior esse Judaeus!' (Even if it were proved to me that the messiah had already come, I would not consider myself a worse Jew for all that).³⁹ The ancient present-oriented function of the messiah, rooted in actual sacral kingship, endures in an ironic way although, of course, future-oriented messianism is more prominent.⁴⁰ The key point for this entire discussion, however, is that *a strong orientation toward sacralizing the present through ritual-covenantal action ('Sinai') is more prominent than any form of messianism in the canonical texts of rabbinic literature.*⁴¹ One can make this claim without rejecting the genuine deposit of apocalyptic and other eschatological thought in rabbinic Judaism. None the less, it would be erroneous to think that Judaism is as messianic, as messiah-oriented, as is Christianity. Judaism and Christianity are not phenomenologically similar structures differing only over the identity of the messiah. They are different structures, each of which constitutes messianism in its own way and gives it a different weight, centrality, and significance.

Scholars differ over how much weight to give messianism in rabbinic thought, as well as over how to understand it. I will consider here three major scholars: Gershom Scholem, Ephraim Urbach, and Jacob Neusner by way of trying to illumine a methodologically sophisticated approach to the question of hope in rabbinic Judaism. Gershom

³⁹ On Albo's participation in the disputation, see Isaac Husik (ed.), *Sefer Ha-Ikharim: Book of Principles*, 5 vols. (Philadelphia, Pa.: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1946), i. pp. xv–xviii. On Albo's demotion of the belief in the coming of the messiah from a dogma, according to Maimonides, to a subsidiary principle, see Collette Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) and Menachem Kellner, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

⁴⁰ The idea that the messiah is among us now, as a beggar at the city gates, and would make himself manifest if only we listened to God's voice (citing Ps. 95: 7) is found in B. Sanhedrin 98a.

⁴¹ A good example of both holding onto messianism and contextualizing it in a way that diminishes its salience may be found in the additions to the third of the Eighteen Benedictions for the holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The paragraphs beginning with 'u ve-*hen*' proclaim the kingship of God in the present as well as the hope (*tikvah tovah*) that he will fully redeem those who seek him in the future. They anticipate the Davidic messiah but none the less reserve the accomplishment of the salient features of redemption for God himself. Redemption is both future-oriented and incipient in the present ('For as we know . . . your Name is awesome over all You have created'), both particular to Israel and universal in scope. See Elie Munk, *The World of Prayer*, 2 vols. (New York: Feldheim, 2007), ii. 244–5.

Scholem, the great scholar of Jewish mysticism, discerns a strong dialectical tension between the conservative orientation of the halakha—the orientation towards a holy, sacramental life in an eternal present—and the restorative–utopian orientation focused on the end of history, which rabbinic Judaism inherits from late- and post-biblical apocalypticism. In Scholem’s view a deep and vital current of anti-nomian, anarchic future hope flows beneath the stability-seeking rationalism of conservative, halakhic Judaism.⁴² All Jewish messianism grows out of an apocalyptic conviction of the catastrophic telos of history: chaos, decline, and upheaval are inevitable as history runs into tragedy. Human beings are powerless to do anything about it. The great future redemption is entirely independent of human effort and wholly discontinuous with the course and character of current, experienced reality. (Recall the second eschatological framework of the Bible, noted above, where the future will be entirely new, entirely disjointed from the historical continuum.) Rabbinic messianism, in Scholem’s view, owes more to the apocalypticists than to the diffuse redemptive visions of the biblical prophets. The apocalyptic literature emphasizes human passivity, the fixity and obscurity of the end time, as well as its resistance to human manipulation. The Jews cannot do anything to bring the messiah. Hope is focused beyond history, not on human struggle or on immanent development within history.

The inevitable, coming catastrophe is balanced by both modestly restorative and wildly utopian visions of a worldly paradise on the other side of chaos and collapse. Although some rabbinic texts envision a messianic order no different from the present one, except for Israel’s liberation from servitude to gentile kingdoms (*shebud malchuyot*), other texts rehearse a world more grand and transformed than our own.⁴³ ‘The renewal of the world is simply more than its restoration’, as Scholem puts it.⁴⁴ The rational, purely restorative view—which comports most easily with the conservative tendency of halakhah—reaches its apogee in Maimonides. But, this is a minority report. The apocalyptic view suffuses folk piety and finds expression in kabbalah, where a Torah of the end times, a *torat ha-mashiach*, will replace the (so to

⁴² On Scholem’s historiography and the cultural factors which influenced it, see Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History*.

⁴³ For non-apocalyptic, ‘rationalized’ visions of the future, see B. Baba Batra 99a, B. Berachot 34b.

⁴⁴ Scholem, *Messianic Idea in Jewish History*, 14.

speak) flawed Torah of our present times. Such radical hopes naturally threaten or subvert rabbinic authority. The rabbis were committed to downgrading the flamboyantly utopian to the moderately restorative. The rationale for the latter is that the full Torah, as interpreted by the rabbis, could not be practised in its comprehensiveness in other than a restored, Davidic kingdom. This, in effect, is the premise of Maimonides's code, which culminates in his thoroughly rational, anti-supernatural portrayal of the messiah and his age. Thus, eschatological restoration becomes the proper context for sacralizing, halakhic observance. Sinai and Zion are reconciled. On Scholem's telling, however, this reconciliation of tendencies was never so tidy. Explosions of messianic fervour, which jeopardized the balance of the rabbinic system, occurred throughout Jewish history, indeed, still do occur. Scholem's researches into the history of Jewish messianism were partly directed to polemicizing against the messianic activism of his time: the post-1967 growth of the Israeli settler movement, which was nourished by a theology of mystical messianism.⁴⁵

Scholem's reading of rabbinic literature flows from his somewhat romantic philosophy of history in which 'subterranean' currents, suppressed by the religious establishment, are the bearers of authentic spiritual creativity. He is thus inclined to see an underground apocalyptic stream as the distant source of both Jewish mysticism—his general preoccupation—and messianic hope. He exports the passivity of apocalypticism to messianism as a whole, erring badly, in the views of Urbach and Neusner, about the role of human action in divine redemption. His great essay on messianism in Judaism, illuminating as it is, may more accurately represent its author's melancholy reflections on the debility of messianic hope than it does the thought of the ancient and medieval rabbis. At the conclusion of his survey and analysis, Scholem writes:

For the Messianic idea is not only consolation and hope. Every attempt to realize it tears open the abysses which lead each of its manifestations ad absurdum. There is something grand about living in hope, but at the same time there something profoundly unreal about it. It diminishes the singular worth of the individual, and he can never fulfill himself, because the incompleteness of his endeavors eliminates precisely what constitutes its highest value. Thus in Judaism the Messianic idea has compelled a life lived in

⁴⁵ See esp. Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, trans. Michael Swirsky and Jonathan Chipman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

deferment, in which nothing can be done definitively, nothing can be irrevocably accomplished. One may say, perhaps, that the Messianic idea is the real anti-existentialist idea. Precisely understood, there is nothing concrete which can be accomplished by the unredeemed. This makes for the greatness of the Messianism, but also for its constitutional weakness.⁴⁶

Having constituted messianism in such a way that its most authentic expression is also its most feckless and self-defeating, Scholem cannot be other than melancholy about the position the messianist is obliged to occupy—life lived in deferment. Hope, on this account, is illusory. Modern Zionism, although born of messianic hope, broke from the passivity such hope, in Scholem's account, entailed. The modern Zionist project 'no longer allows itself to be fed on hopes'.⁴⁷ Judaism is staked henceforth to history, not to 'meta-history', the transcendent orientation of an always coming, never arrived messianism. But, whether the Jews can survive the rough descent into history from their commanding heights of illusory, meta-historical hope is an open question.

Both Urbach and Neusner, by contrast, without disregarding the impact of apocalyptic esotericism, fantasy, and passivity on the ancient rabbis, none the less reject Scholem's emphasis on the irrelevance of human action to redemption. They concur that redemption is contingent on human action, on Israel's behaviour in history. The sought-for future is tied, with moral, political, and ritual bands, to the present. In Urbach's great work, *The Sages*, he tries, like Scholem, to ascertain the historical contexts in which the discrepant expressions of rabbinic eschatology and messianism arose. Rabbinic literature envisions both restitution, a this-worldly, realistic national-political-territorial restoration of Israel and a radical, utopian transformation of the world. It envisions a sober, gradual attainment of restoration *and* an apocalyptic breakdown and rebirth; continuity and discontinuity. It envisions an end whose time may be, in principle, calculated and an end that may be brought by human endeavour, despite its appointed time. It envisions a number of scenarios for what the world will be like in messianic times and for who the messiah is (or, more accurately, for who the messiahs are).⁴⁸ Additionally, as noted above, rabbinic literature contains a far

⁴⁶ Scholem, *Messianic Idea in Jewish History*, 35.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 36.

⁴⁸ The Talmud, like Qumran and some of the pseudepigrapha, envision two messiahs: in the case of the Talmud, a 'messiah son of Joseph', who will fight, suffer, and die and a 'messiah son of David', who will be victorious and usher in the messianic age.

more developed set of views than the Hebrew Bible on personal immortality—the afterlife of the individual soul—and on both the personal and national resurrection of the dead. All of these are loci of hope. None of them is systematized within classical rabbinic literature into a coherent teaching; that does not come before the work of the philosopher–rabbi, Saadia Gaon, in the tenth century.⁴⁹ In the pre-philosophical rabbinic literature, the various ideas are so discordant that, Urbach writes, they reach ‘antitheses that imply the complete negation of one doctrine by the other’.⁵⁰ One key to the reason for such heterogeneous contents is the different historical situations in which the relevant views took hold.

Urbach argues that in texts coming from pre-Hasmonean times, such as *Sirach*, such ideas as the resurrection of the dead or post-mortem reward and punishment play no role, nor do eschatological or messianic expectations. The mode is realistic—‘primarily concerned with the supplementation of the deficiencies of Israel’s sovereignty, well-being, and prosperity’.⁵¹ The trauma of persecution by the Seleucids, however, led to the belief in resurrection of the dead, occurring in the late biblical book of Daniel and in the extra-canonical 2 Maccabees (7: 14). The tragedy of mass martyrdom required a profound shift in expectations. In dark and unjust times the idea of an eventual return, a resurrection, of the suffering saints became plausible. Even an eventual resurrection of the dead, however, proved to be insufficient for the outraged conscience of some religious Jews. Eventual disillusionment with Hasmonean rule, with a Temple in which the priests were no longer descendants of Zadok, as well as with increasingly harsh Roman rule after 63 BCE, led some circles towards extreme apocalyptic speculation. They abandoned the gradualist–meliorist stance of the pre-Hasmonean writers and saw a much more urgent need for salvation, and an expanded role for a saviour figure or figures. The Qumran sectarians envisaged a priestly messiah and an Israelite one. A strong, exclusive fixation on a Davidic messiah appears in the extra-canonical Psalms of Solomon: declaring that a

⁴⁹ Saadia’s great synthesis of the Talmudic materials into a coherent doctrine is found in treatises VII, VIII, and IX of Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*.

⁵⁰ Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), 649. See, in general, ch. 17: ‘Redemption’ (pp. 649–92).

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 658.

future messiah must come from the House of David was a desperate polemic against the non-Davidic Hasmoneans and their assumption of kingly prerogatives. The Psalms of Solomon, although close to pharisaic Judaism, made a break with existing institutions that other Pharisees endorsed. The mainstream pharisaic sages, proto-rabbis, so to speak, did not turn against either the Hasmoneans or the Temple. Their fixation on a Davidic messiah was not as total as the author of the Psalms of Solomon. With the destruction of the Temple by the Romans, however, the sages themselves became more open to catastrophic and apocalyptic versions of hope. The balance of their thinking no longer tipped towards a purely restitutive or restorationist ideal. None the less, some sages, such as Johanan Ben Zakkai, tried to diminish the utopian dreams of an imminent rebuilding of the Temple or of radical action, revolt, that would hasten a catastrophic collapse and, hence, a new beginning. Johanan and his disciples taught that 'if Israel repents, they will be redeemed'.⁵² Patient commitment to the emerging rabbinic way of life—the sacralization of the present moment—will suffice to secure a blessed future. These disciples differed over whether the end would ensue at a fixed time, in principle subject to calculation, or if it would come at any time that God so chose, including a time when Israel had made itself worthy of redemption. They argued therefore about whether redemption precedes repentance or whether repentance brings redemption. For Urbach, repentance remains crucial. He rejects any interpretation of rabbinic texts that inclines in a Pauline direction. Human action, of a specific kind, remains decisive for redemption, in his view. The reason is as follows: *The sages ultimately transcend the need for the symbolic trope of the messiah altogether, and for the complex of conceptual problems it entails.* God himself will redeem the Jews with an everlasting redemption. Israel has (or needs) no messiah (B. Sanhedrin 94a–b). With God as the ultimate and effective saviour, the emphasis passes to *covenantal action*—observance of the mitzvot—rather than to any other sort of action or to passive apocalyptic speculation. The rabbinic system is upheld.

Jacob Neusner comes to much the same conclusion. In his study of the rabbis' treatment of the 'messiah myth' in the Talmud of the Land of Israel and the Talmud of Babylonia, as well as the various books of ancient Jewish scriptural exegesis, he concludes that

⁵² Ibid. 668; B. Sanhedrin 97a–98b.

In this [rabbinic] literature what is important is the life of ritual learning and doing. Attaching the promise of the coming of the Messiah reinforced the demands that truly mattered to the framers of the documents under study. If Israel at large yearned for the redemption and the end, then telling them to attain that goal by doing what rabbis wanted would vastly strengthen the rabbinic system. Perhaps we may say . . . that the charismatic Messiah myth served as the engine to draw the train of fixed practices and patterns down the 'routinized' tracks of the law. Absorbed with a system essentially antithetical to the activist mode defined at the time when the Messiah myth had previously governed, the impatient expectation expressed therein now served the cause of *modified hope and skeptical anticipation*.⁵³

Messianism, drastically modified and reduced in imaginative scope, is brought to serve a conservative, halakhic orientation. That is an orientation in which human action, of a kind, is the one thing necessary. The single, repeated message of the rabbinic system, in Neusner's view, is that 'Israel bears ultimate responsibility for its own condition. Israel therefore has the power, also, to revise and reshape its destiny. Blaming one's own sins for what has happened carries a powerful message of hope: just as we did it to ourselves, so we can save ourselves'.⁵⁴ Hope is tied to our own ability to do what God expects us to do (after which, we then leave the rest to him). A poignant instance of this is found in B. Sanhedrin 97b. The text discusses the apparent asymmetry of expectation: the Jews ardently wait for God to redeem them but what if God does not share their ardour?

Wait for him, as it is written, 'Though he tarry, wait for him'. Should you say, *We* look forward [to his coming] but *he* does not: therefore Scripture says 'And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you . . .' [Isa. 30: 18]. But since *we* look forward to it, and *he* does likewise, what delays [his

⁵³ Neusner, *Messiah in Context*, 177 (emphasis added).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 185. Contrast Neusner's correlation of human effort and responsibility with hope and Karl Heinrich Rengstorf's polemical reading of the texts, which is wholly conditioned by his Lutheran theology: 'the Messianic expectation of the Rabbis is cursed by the uncertainty which afflicts future expectation in any religion of works. Though it is certain that the fulfilment will come one day, there is an oppressive sense of being more or less seriously guilty of postponing it. Nor is there any way of measuring how near or far we are from the goal. Only God can decide this, and His assessment is wrapped in impenetrable darkness. The only sure point is that He is strictly just, and will freely give His people nothing. Thus, for all the enthusiastic depictions of the coming One there is a certain note of weariness and especially of uncertainty in Rabbinic expectations of the end' (Kittel, *A Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ii. 525). The tendentious eisegesis of this interpretation ('oppressive', 'guilty', 'weariness') belongs, one hopes, to a bygone era.

coming]? The Attribute of Justice delays it. But since the Attribute of Justice delays it, why do we await it? To be rewarded [for hoping], as it is written, 'blessed are all they that wait for him'.⁵⁵

The Jews must strive to be worthy of redemption. Doing all they can do as God's covenant partners, they must, in the end, wait for him to fulfil his promise to redeem them. The text establishes that the covenantal relationship is not, in this case, asymmetrical: both Israel and God wait for one another. What then delays God's gracious redemption of Israel? His own *middat ha-din*—the attribute of strict justice—which the rabbis see as counterbalanced by his *middat ha-rahamim*, the attribute of compassion. But if his attribute of judgement prevents him, as it were, from acting, what point is there to waiting? Perhaps redemption will never come? The text asserts that the very act of hopeful expectation, of waiting and hoping, is itself meritorious. Hope is, the language of reward notwithstanding, a virtue: it is a kind of action always open to us and always inherently worthy. The first question that the soul will be asked after death, when it stands before God in judgement, is 'Did you hope for salvation?' (B. Shabbat 31a). To hope is noble; to despair is ignoble. Rabbinic hope, we might then say, like biblical hope, focuses on both an anticipated future and an affirmation of the present—of covenantal fidelity in the here and now.

A striking instance of this duality of focus is found in B. Megillah 17b. Here, the sequence of events that will accompany the dawn of the messianic age is extrapolated on the basis of the order of the blessings in the daily petitionary prayer of the synagogue, the Eighteen Benedictions. The unfolding of the end time is enacted daily in present time. First, the exiles will be gathered in (= blessing ten of the Eighteen Benedictions). Then, judgement will be re-established (= blessing eleven) so that wickedness and sin will be curtailed (= blessing twelve). The righteous will be exalted (= blessing thirteen), as will rebuilt Jerusalem (= blessing fourteen). The son of David will return (= blessing fifteen), prayer will return (= blessing sixteen), and then the Temple will be re-established (= blessing seventeen). The yearning for messianic redemption, although tersely expressed in a single petitionary prayer in the sequence (blessing fifteen), is also diffused over the prayer as a whole. The normative act of thrice-daily prayer, the sturdy backbone of covenantal action for the traditional Jew,

⁵⁵ Neusner, *Messiah in Context*, 171.

becomes itself a ritual enactment of messianic time. Rabbinic prayer is thus a prolepsis of the days of the messiah. Hallowing the present ('Sinai') participates in the redemptive future.

The units of prayer which eventually form the liturgy of the synagogue are at the heart of the ordinary (male) Jew's daily experience of his faith. The prayers represent a consensual statement of what it is proper for a rabbinic Jew to hope for. The liturgy channelled ordinary, personal hopes (for wisdom, repentance, health, forgiveness, and sustenance, for example) and higher order, collective hopes (for the restoration of the Jewish people, the Temple service, and the coming of the Davidic messiah) into an approved mode of expression. Additionally, the second blessing of the prayer acknowledges God as the one who resurrects the dead. The hope for the resurrection of the dead is proclaimed thrice daily. A cluster of approved, one might say canonical, loci of hope have endured in these basic units of prayer for almost two millennia.

In addition to the subtle allusion to the sequence of the messianic era noted above and the prayers that crystallize personal and collective hope, three explicit invocations of hope, using words derived from the biblical root *kvh*, appear in the Eighteen Benedictions. One is a blessing, more accurately an imprecation against heretics, found in the twelfth benediction: 'May the slanderers have no hope (*tikvah*); may all wickedness perish instantly; may all thy enemies be soon cut down. Do thou speedily uproot and crush the arrogant; cast them down and humble them speedily in our days. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who breakest the enemies and humblest the arrogant.'⁵⁶ This blessing is thought to derive from the post-70 CE synod that salvaged Judaism in the wake of the destruction of the Second Temple and Commonwealth. Exactly who the heretics (the term *slanderers* (*malshinim*) is an artefact of centuries of Christian censorship) were is unclear. Most likely they were Jewish Christians, Jewish Gnostics, and others. Such technical issues aside, the import of the blessing is clear: some persons do not deserve to have hope. The prayer is unforgiving in its call for strict and certain justice. Thus, the first terminologically explicit reference to hope in the central Jewish prayer is a condemnation to hopelessness for the wicked. Although heretics have abandoned God

⁵⁶ Philip Birnbaum (ed.), *Daily Prayer Book* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1949), 88.

and made themselves his enemies, of the Jewish people the prayer says: 'for your salvation we have hoped all day long' (fifteenth benediction) and 'forever we have hoped in you' (eighteenth benediction). Thus, the other explicit references to hope in the text attest to the Jews' unflinching faith and trust in God. God has been the sole object of Israel's ultimate hope. Hopelessness, by contrast, befits those who turn away from God.

It is rabbinic Judaism's deep covenantal structure, inherited from the Bible yet modified in light of subsequent historical experience that both preserves room for human action and emphasizes the ultimate action of the divine.⁵⁷ Rabbinic Judaism was unwilling to follow Paul in asserting that salvation was a free, unmerited gift of God—Israel must prove itself worthy of salvation. But neither was Judaism willing to endorse theurgy or a religion of 'works righteousness' where only human action mattered and grace could be, as it were, coerced. Rabbinic prayer makes it clear that

It is not on account of our own righteousness that we offer our supplications before thee, but on account of thy great compassion. What are we? What is our life? What is our goodness? What is our righteousness? What our helpfulness? What our strength? What our might? What can we say in thy presence, Lord our God and God of our fathers? . . . [only that] we are thy people, thy people of the covenant, the children of Abraham, thy friend.⁵⁸

Israel has standing before God not because of its own flawed performances and wavering fidelity but because of its ancestors and, crucially, because of God's fidelity to Israel. Were it not for God's love for Israel, Israel would neither survive nor be capable of loving God in return. The rabbinic system, with its deep covenantal structure, both honours the freedom and action that underwrite human dignity and affirms the limits on the efficacy of such action. As we have seen, hope flourishes best where moral agency remains possible. In this sense, the rabbinic system offers a sturdy platform for hope.

What emerges from this review is the outline of a system in which hope for the future plays an important but not a cardinal role. The rabbinic Jew hoped for historical rectification and redemption for his

⁵⁷ On the transformation of covenantal motifs and ideas in rabbinic literature vis-à-vis biblical literature, see Alan Mittleman, *The Scepter Shall Not Depart from Judah: Perspectives on the Persistence of the Political in Judaism* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2000), ch. 3.

⁵⁸ Birnbaum, *Daily Prayer Book*, 24.

nation, as well as for individual reward in the afterlife which would be contingent on covenantal fidelity in earthly life and a generous role for God's grace. Imaginative focus on this conjoined future, however, must not supplant a present-oriented, task-centred focus on sacred action in the here and now. Hope as the intuition and affirmation of divine goodness in the midst of life was inherently virtuous and expressive of the depth of faith. The realization of the goodness of God, as creator, revealer, and redeemer, whose redemption is already anticipated in the present in, for example, the experience of the Sabbath, diminishes the tendency towards flight into a fantastic or suppositious future. The conservative tendency (Scholem's term and not entirely fair) represented by halakhah constrained messianism. Law presents inertia to Utopia but lends stability to hope.

Hope in Early Christianity

We have looked at what I have termed 'loci of hope' in rabbinic Judaism in part because explicit references to 'hope', such as were amply available in the Hebrew Scriptures, are scarce. This is emphatically not the case in the New Testament, where Greek terms for 'hope' such as *elpis* and its derivatives are used frequently in the Epistles and Acts. Of these, the Pauline epistles and Hebrews stand out for the theological centrality of the concept of hope. These texts raise hope to a level of conceptual development, of intentional theological articulation not found in rabbinic literature. They impart to hope many of the conceptual features that the idea continues to carry down into our own time.

Hebrews, an extended argument on behalf of the superiority of Christ to Moses, of Christ's priesthood to the levitical priesthood, and of Christ's sacrifice to the animal offerings, makes hope 'the anchor of the soul' (Heb. 6: 19). 'Hope, set before us [Christians] . . . enters into the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf' (Heb. 6: 18–19).⁵⁹ Hope is reified in this

⁵⁹ All citations from the New Testament are taken from Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger (eds.), *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: Revised Standard Version* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977). Growing up in the state of Rhode Island, I was aware that the state flag consisted of an anchor with the word 'Hope' underneath it. I was not aware, however, of the New Testament derivation of this symbol until I read the Epistle to the

rhetoric into an agent of salvation. Hope grounds, anchors, the whole being of a person and then intercedes, in the manner of the high priest, in the Holy of Holies on the Christian believer's behalf. Hope is not here primarily the subjective expectation of the believer; it is a reality signifying the salvific activity of Christ in the believer's life here and now. Thus, hope is a means of communion or connection with God. After contrasting Moses' work as a servant *in* God's house with Christ's sonship—a higher status than servanthood—*over* God's house, Hebrews asserts that the church *is* God's house, if only it holds fast to its hope (Heb. 3: 6). Christ is 'a better hope' [than the ancient Hebrew cult] 'through which we draw near to God' (Heb. 7: 19).

If hope per se is a kind of medium, linking the Christian with Christ, how then is hope differentiated from faith, which is also a form of relationship? Hebrews famously defines faith as 'the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen' (Heb. 11: 1). Here hope reverts to the future-oriented sense of positive expectation. Faith, in this account, lends certitude to hope. Faith assures believers that the object of hope is real rather than illusory. Even though they do not possess this object now, it is promised to them and will be theirs. It is the promise of a 'better country, a heavenly one' (Heb. 11: 16). Faith is radical trust in the fulfilment of divine promises. But, if one has faith—the conviction that God is utterly reliable and will therefore redeem the believer—then in what sense does one need hope? Isn't hope otiose when one has the certainty of faith? Isn't hope almost blasphemous, in so far as it may imply doubt about the reliability of God?

Perhaps it is to avoid this quandary that the meaning of hope oscillates between two senses: the future-oriented sense and the sense of affirmation of or even existential participation in God's goodness in the present.⁶⁰ If hope is primarily the latter, then the problem of blasphemous doubt is avoided, as hope is not a kind of belief or

Hebrews as an adult. There is some irony to be found in the fact that the only colony founded explicitly on the principle of religious liberty and the separation of church and state should have on its flag the most explicit New Testament symbol of any American state.

⁶⁰ Consider Horst Balz's formulation of this position: 'In this case, hope would neither merely stand for being open towards the future nor simply for the power of Utopia on human consciousness, enabling man to approach that which does, so far, not exist, and setting him against that which is present and factual. Hope would be rather the expression of an experience with God, with him who has created everything that exists and, by this, having initiated a movement in his direction. . . The believers let themselves be drawn,

judgement but a mode of being, a way of living in the world. However, hope cannot only be present-oriented or existentially participatory; that does too much damage to the conventional sense of hope as future expectation. The two senses uneasily coexist with one another. Hope qua expectation and anticipation is related to and balanced by a more sacramental, participatory modality of hopefulness. This ambiguity, as we have seen, already inheres in the biblical and rabbinic treatments of hope. The New Testament Epistles, as theologically articulate texts, present this ambiguity in an even more distinct way.

Consider this affirmation from 1 Peter:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Pet. 1: 3–5)

To be a Christian is to be reborn in a state of 'living hope'. Living hope is a vibrant, confident waiting for God. But it is also a hope that lives now, so to speak; a hope that in some measure has already been fulfilled. Christ has been resurrected and the Christian has been reborn. Eschatology has been realized in a preliminary fashion. The 'history of salvation' has been inaugurated. The 'last time' has not yet arrived but faith already knows something of what will then be revealed. 'Through him you have confidence in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God' (1 Pet. 1: 21). This verse may also be translated as 'so that your faith *is* hope in God'. Hope is both waiting *and* knowing; both enduring with confidence and courage towards the promised future *and* dwelling with Christ in the midst of the present, especially in the midst of present suffering. To hope and to have faith are linguistically almost interchangeable. They are, at the least, conceptually inextricable.⁶¹

For Paul, faith, by which we are alone justified before God, is modelled by Abraham, who lived before the giving of the law on

through Christ, into the motion of the whole creation towards God, and *this is what hope would signify* (emphasis added). Horst Balz, 'Early Christian Faith as "Hope against Hope"', in Reventlow, *Eschatology in the Bible*, 33–4.

⁶¹ Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ii. 531.

Sinai. God promised Abraham that he would become the father of many nations. But, as Abraham's life unfolded, there was no empirical reason to believe this promise. Abraham had to 'hope against hope' in order to believe (Rom. 4: 18). Ordinary hope would have been hollow, given the advanced age of Abraham and Sarah. Where the ordinary hope of expectant calculation would necessarily fail, it was the higher hope that is faith that gave Abraham his resolve and confidence. Hope against hope: true, supernatural hope (= faith) over merely natural, human hope. Thus, hope, like its sibling, faith, is a gift of God. Through grace comes 'good hope' (1 Thess. 2: 16).

Christians, who affirm the resurrection of Jesus, hope, know, and have faith in their own resurrection (1 Cor. 15: 12–19). Pagans, who do not know or have faith in Christ, literally have no hope (1 Thess. 4: 13). As Paul reminds his once-pagan readers in Ephesus: 'remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope' (Eph. 2: 12). Does Paul mean by this that pagans are unable to hope (in so far as they do not have, by definition, faith in Christ) or that their hopes are spurious, unworthy, or vain? He appears to mean both. At first, Paul seems to insert the hope of Christians into the hope of all creatures. The hopes of pagans and of Christians are thus continuous or at least comparable. The only relevant difference is that Christian hopes will be fulfilled while pagan hopes will be disappointed. Paul, however, also implies that while all creatures hope, the hoping of Christians is categorically different—and not just because their hopes are being and will be definitively fulfilled. Christian hope is different because of the manner in which it is experienced and effectuated in the course of a Christian's life:

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for the adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (Rom. 8: 22–5)

Pagans hope for things that they can see, that is, they hope for worldly goods that are intelligible to them from their experience. Christians hope for things that are unintelligible to the pagan observer, such as the

eccentrically Judaic resurrection of the dead. They hope for this because the Spirit has led them to do so; the Spirit both infuses them with hope and directs them to hope for something that appears foolish or incomprehensible to Christianity's 'cultured despisers'. To the extent that hope is a disposition bred not by the natural constitution of man but by a supernatural endowment of the Holy Spirit, pagans fail to hope in a meaningful sense. In so far as hope is a mode of participation in the being of the true God, pagans by definition fail to hope.

Furthermore, Christian hope *saves*. Hoping for resurrection, for eternal life, is not just intending an exotic object; the act itself constitutes a transformation of the human person, of the individual or community that holds such a hope. To know truly the hope to which God has called the Church (Eph. 2: 18) is to be transformed. It is to have a spirit of wisdom, to have the 'eyes of your hearts' enlightened, and to know the 'immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe'. To hope in Christ is to become 'very bold' (2 Cor. 3: 12). It is to become pure, as God is pure, as a non-Pauline writer maintains (1 John 3: 3). The intense existential-participatory aspect of hope is particularly evident in Paul's foundational statement of the Christian virtues, faith, hope, and charity (or love), on which Aquinas builds. In 1 Corinthians 13: 8–13, an oft-cited text, Paul writes:

Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. *So faith, hope and love abide, these three, but the greatest of these is love.*

It would be odd to say that at the end, when we understand all and are fully understood, we still have something to hope for. Yet, hope abides, as do faith and love. This is only intelligible in the view that hope is a mode of participation in divine being rather than, in its quotidian future-oriented sense, an expectation or anticipation of a positive outcome. For the positive outcome has already occurred. Hope, as a supernatural virtue, to use Aquinas's language, endures beyond this outcome, even unto the end when God is 'all in all'.

Post-New Testament Development

The nearest analogue—and it is not very near—to the vast project of rabbinic Judaism vis-à-vis biblical Judaism is the work of the Church Fathers, the greatest of whom was Saint Augustine. Let us consider, finally, Augustine's reflections on the concept of hope bequeathed to him by Paul and other New Testament writers. Augustine carries forward the philosophical legacy of antiquity, particularly Plato and the Neo-Platonists, all the while subjecting it to a thorough, Christian critique.⁶² In his famous delineation of two cities, the City of God and the earthly city, he traces the limits of politics and thus the limits of human hope in worldly possibility. He affirms the possibility of securing some necessary goods (principally order) through political action—and hence affirms the limited viability of worldly hope—while rejecting the ultimacy of such hope and of the politics towards which such misbegotten hope might point.⁶³ While the ancients, such as Plato and Aristotle, hoped for human self-sufficiency and flourishing within the political order, Augustine exposes the sin that lies at the base of all political orders: the pride, ambition, and *libido dominandi* that fuels even the best politics.⁶⁴ As such, both the moral virtues that contribute to political life and the constitutions that effectuate political life are from a Christian perspective inherently flawed, irremediably so.

A frequent target of Augustine's polemic is the Greek moral tradition represented by the Stoics. In Book XIV of the *City of God*, for example, Augustine argues against the classical view that virtue confers

⁶² An excellent recent study of Augustine as a philosophical (i.e. not a purely doctrinal, theological) thinker is John M. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Most useful for our concerns are the chapters on Augustine's moral psychology and ethics (ch. 5) and on his political teaching (ch. 6).

⁶³ For an important contribution to the understanding of Augustine's political thought in all of its nuance and complexity, see Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1995). See also John von Heyking, *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World* (Columbia, Miss.: University of Missouri Press, 2001). These works seek to dispel the conventional image of Augustine as thoroughly negative towards the possibilities of worldly politics. Both Bethke Elshtain and von Heyking find a virtue orientation in Augustine, despite Augustine's critique of classical virtue ethics, that permits or requires the amelioration of the *civitas terrena*. For a critique of von Heyking, see the review of his book by Eric Gregory in *Journal of Religion*, 83 (2003), 667–9.

⁶⁴ Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized*, 205.

nobility, dignity, self-sufficiency, and, finally, perfection on the men who achieve it. The peculiarly Stoic interpretation of virtue—involving the mastery and transcendence of the passions and their replacement by right reason—Augustine fully rejects. The Christian need not and ought not to aim at the purported but mistaken good of rational mastery of the passions. That is based on a prideful belief that we can save ourselves by our own intellectual and moral exertions. The Christian can and should rightly feel a range of passions, fuelled by underlying human yearning and desire. The passions, or loves, must be properly ordered (*ordo amoris*), however, and this by cognizance of divine truth and openness to divine grace.⁶⁵

Among us Christians, on the other hand, the citizens of the Holy City of God, as they live by God's standards in the pilgrimage of this present life, feel fear and desire, pain and gladness in conformity with the holy Scriptures and sound doctrine; and because their love is right, all these feelings are right in them. They fear eternal punishment and desire eternal life. They feel pain in their actual situation, because they are still 'groaning inwardly as they wait for adoption, for the ransoming of their bodies (Romans 8: 23)'; *they rejoice in the hope* that the saying 'Death has been swallowed up in victory (1 Cor 15: 54)' will become a reality.⁶⁶

The passions per se are not, contra Stoicism, bad, but only bad when misdirected. Unless ordered by the love of God *and* the love of the neighbour, the passions and the pagan philosophical project of mastering them only deepen our descent into estrangement from God and from our ultimate destiny. Thus, hope, which Stoicism and Greek philosophical ethics in general repudiates, is entirely legitimate when directed towards God. Criticizing the illusory Stoic goal of *apatheia*, Augustine writes:

Then if *apatheia* describes a condition in which there is no fear to terrify, no pain to torment, then it is a condition to be shunned in this life, if we wish to lead the right kind of life, the life that is, according to God's will. But in that life of bliss which, it is promised will be everlasting, *it is clearly right that we should hope for this condition.*⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Augustine, *Concerning The City of God against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), XV. 22 (pp. 636–7).

⁶⁶ Ibid. XIV. 9 (pp. 561–2) (emphasis added).

⁶⁷ Ibid. 565 (emphasis added).

The love of God (*amor Dei*) is decisive. The moral agent must act for no reason other than the love of God—impossible as this is for sinful, flawed creatures such as ourselves—and be directed by the love of God in the midst of action. Thinking and acting on the basis of the love of God is the new constitution of virtue. But virtue must not be understood on the old model of humanly achievable excellence; virtue—the intellectual and moral practice of the love of God—is possible only because grace works within the Christian to effectuate love. Christian virtue and pagan ‘virtue’ both remain radically incomplete. To the extent that virtue approaches sufficiency it is only because of the presence of grace. The ‘virtue’ of pagans who do not know Christ, who have not experienced grace, is actually vice rather than virtue, although their vice need not be fully vicious.⁶⁸

Augustine thus secures hope as a virtue, against Greek philosophy, while fundamentally reconstructing the philosophical significance of virtue. In Book XIX of the *City of God*, Augustine contrasts the pagan hope for happiness (*beatitudo*) with the Christian hope: ‘My purpose is to make clear the great difference *between their hollow realities and our hope, the hope given by God*, together with the realization—that is, the true bliss—which he will give to us . . .’⁶⁹ Augustine assays the philosophical understanding of the ultimate goods of human life and of the various anthropologies on which they are based. His philosophical authority, the Roman Platonist Varro, settles on a life that combines both *vita contemplativa* and *vita activa* (as the human being is both soul and body), supplied with a generous enjoyment of worldly goods. A mixed contemplative–active life supplied with worldly goods is further enhanced when ordered by virtue and lived out in political society. Varro and the philosophers envision a this-worldly horizon for the ideal life. Against this, however, Augustine argues that ‘eternal life is the Supreme Good (*aeternam vitam esse summum bonum*), and eternal death is the Supreme Evil and that to achieve the one and escape the other we must live rightly’, which entails, as Paul asserts (Rom. 1: 17), glossing Habakkuk 2: 4, living by faith.⁷⁰ Here ‘living by faith’ means believing that God’s way is the right way. Marred by the Fall, we ‘do not yet see our good, and hence we have to seek it by believing’.

⁶⁸ Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized*, 171.

⁶⁹ Augustine, *City of God*, XIX. 1 (p. 843).

⁷⁰ Ibid. XIX. 4 (p. 852).

The philosophers are drastically confused in thinking that ‘the Ultimate Good and the Ultimate Evil are to be found in this life’. Neither the goods of the body, nor the goods of the soul persuasively claim to be the ultimate good. Nor can virtue—here Augustine uses the term in its purely philosophical, unreconstructed sense—make such a claim. For what is virtue’s activity in this world ‘but unceasing warfare with vices’ and how can restless combat qualify as the *summum bonum*?

Augustine surveys the classical virtues and shows how each depends on the premise of evil that must be resisted; but the ongoing intrusion of evil is surely incompatible with a life of ultimate good. The philosophers either denigrate the strength of evil or counsel escape from it through suicide. These contradictory moves (evil is not real except if it is so real that you should take your own life to escape it) infect the philosophical project with incoherence. Philosophy cannot lift its gaze above the tragic horizon of the immanent; it has no genuine hope.⁷¹ Even where the pagan philosophers achieve virtue on their own terms—which, although fundamentally flawed, is surely better than the unadulterated vice that typifies the human condition of the earthly city—their condition is hopeless because they do not know God. They settle for what they take to be excellence now rather than for the bliss that Christians, in their steadfast endurance underpinned by genuine hope, know to be theirs in the world to come: ‘Yet these philosophers refuse to believe in this blessedness because they do not see it; and so they attempt to fabricate for themselves an utterly delusive happiness by means of a virtue whose falsity is in proportion to its arrogance.’⁷²

Augustine, like his pagan philosophical predecessors, links the telos of true happiness to sufficiency; to a state that exists as an end not as a means. Perfection is completion. The infinite ills of this life, which cannot be rationalized away in the name of virtue, disqualify this life from happiness. Virtue itself is part of the restless misery of this life and does not therefore provide a stable ground for happiness. Only hope, which God has given us, allows us to see beyond immanence and sense the salvation which is our ultimate good.

We see, then, that the Supreme Good of the City of God is everlasting and perfect peace, which is not the peace through which men pass in their mortality, in their journey from birth to death, but that peace in which they

⁷¹ Augustine, *City of God*, XIX. 1 (p. 857).

⁷² *Ibid.*

remain in their immortal state, experiencing no adversity at all. In view of this, can anyone deny that this is the supremely blessed life, or that the present life on earth, however full it may be of the greatest possible blessings of soul and body and of external circumstances, is, in comparison, most miserable? For all that, if anyone accepts the present life in such a spirit that he uses it with the end in view of that other life on which he has set his heart with all his ardour and for which he hopes with all his confidence, such a man may without absurdity be called happy even now, though rather by future hope than in present reality. *Present reality without that hope is, to be sure, a false happiness, in fact, an utter misery.*⁷³

Hope, although strongly oriented towards the future, i.e., the future life of eternal bliss, does endow the present with spiritual and moral goods. Hope facilitates steadfast endurance, endows the mind with discrimination allowing it to rank goods; hope even enables a provisional but real happiness in the present. Present reality is transfigured to a degree by the presence of hope.

Despite his disparagement of the misplaced, worldly hopes of paganism, Augustine does not deride worldly hope altogether. Just as he reconstructs virtue within a Christian mode as the practice of love, he validates hope for those worldly goods necessary for a Christian life, that is, for the life of the City of God as it steadfastly endures within the earthly city. Ultimate hopes coexist with proximate hopes. Just as the rabbis read a domesticated eschatology out of the petitionary prayers of the liturgy, so too Augustine finds the Lord's Prayer to be a concise expression of legitimate hope.

Those who hope in man, including themselves, are cursed, Augustine tells us. Thus, exactly what to hope for, taking care to hope for things that do not entail hope in men or in one's own abilities, requires caution. The Lord's Prayer provides a trustworthy guide to legitimate worldly hope. In Matthew's version of the Prayer, Augustine reminds us, there are seven petitions. Three of these ask for eternal goods and four for temporal goods. The temporal goods—'give us this day our daily bread', 'forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors', 'and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil'—are necessary conditions for achieving the eternal goods. In the heavenly city which is the highest locus of our hope there will be no need for bread, forgiveness, or surcease of temptation. All of these, however, are requisite to a

⁷³ Ibid. XIX. 21 (p. 881).

loving Christian life in the earthly city and so one may (rather, must) hope for them.⁷⁴

It should now be clear that these biblical and post-biblical literatures, both Jewish and Christian, constitute hope as both expectation of a divinely secured future and a kind of virtue, an excellence of Jewish or Christian character, in the present. Yet, even virtue, as we have seen, is too limited a category to capture the full amplitude of hope. Hope discloses a knowledge of or wisdom about the ultimate character of life. It expresses the goodness felt by the faithful to inhere in the reality of Being. The theme of Being is goodness.⁷⁵ Fact and value are joined in the act of affirmation of Being that occurs when one hopes. Hope is the token of a goodness sensed in the fact of one's being. Even were one to hope for nothingness—to despair of life, like Job, and wish for it to cease—one could only do so because one remembered life's goodness but became convinced that goodness was lost and would never return. (But who has such certainty about the future?) Despair takes place against a background of forgotten hope. The therapy of despair is the anamnesis of hope. Hope is primary. It is as primal as our initial confidence in the value of life—a confidence which launches all of our projects to make the world our fit habitation.

The Bible and subsequent Jewish and Christian religious traditions speak of hope in peculiar and (for many, today) unintelligible idioms, but the underlying theme is accessible to all. The affirmation that we make of life—our intuition of the goodness of Being—is the abiding content of hope. Whether we project hope towards the future, and thereby intend the good we seek to flourish in time to come, or sense in our present hopefulness a good which we want to endure, hope recognizes the goodness that grounds life. For the Jew and Christian, this goodness is more than an evaluative choice, preference, or opinion: it is the life of the world, as it were, which finds its form in acts of hope. Being as such has value. Hope is the response of persons of faith to the goodness felt at the roots of the world.

What sense can hope, so construed, have for thoroughgoing secularists who reject affirmations such as these as vaporous or unwarranted? Does

⁷⁴ Augustine, *Faith, Hope and Charity (Enchiridion)*, trans. Bernard M. Peebles, *Writings of Saint Augustine* (New York: Cima Publishing Co, 1947), iv. 465–7.

⁷⁵ A powerful, systematic articulation of this claim may be found in L. E. Goodman, *On Justice: An Essay in Jewish Philosophy* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991).

hope disclose depth for a post-theistic consciousness? In the next chapter, we will pursue the question of a post-theistic, secular framing of hope. We will consider how such Enlightenment thinkers as Condorcet and Kant, and the twentieth-century thinkers Ernst Bloch and Hannah Arendt, separated hope from traditional religious faith yet none the less appropriated it as a secular virtue for our present life. The extent to which they succeed—or fail—in doing so will be a gauge as to the sufficiency of secular versions of ultimate hope.

5

Philosophies of Hope

Radical hope anticipates a good for which those who have the hope as yet lack the appropriate concepts with which to understand it. What would it be for such hope to be justified?

Jonathan Lear

Augustine dismissed, although he did not fully reject, the legitimacy of secular hope. Hope without God is futile. None the less, secular hope (hope for some of the goods of this world—in particular, for the good of political order) while insufficient, is not illegitimate. If secular hope is ordered by religious hope, in this view it has its own provisional validity. What one must not allow is for secular hope to become detached from ultimate hope. God must be the pole star of secular hope. Without God, such hope becomes idolatrous. Only on condition of having an ultimate intention can hope be virtuous rather than vicious.

Modernity may be considered a time in which, to use Peter Gay's phrase, the 'geography of hope' changes.¹ God is no longer the pole star of hope. (And yet, as we shall see, the habit of mutually implicating hope and the sacred remains.) By the eighteenth century, advances in science, medicine, and manners had filled European and American intellectuals with new hope for this world. Their hopes were underwritten by a confident (if occasionally wavering) belief in progress. If the seventeenth century had seen progress as the worldly manifestation of God's Providence, the eighteenth century saw progress as Providence.² A fully fledged, immanent, and secular faith in progress

¹ Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, ii *The Science of Freedom* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 98.

² So the pithy formulation of Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 182.

sidelined, for many, the ancient religious trust in Providence. The human had come into its own. Man had awakened, as Kant said, from his self-imposed immaturity. Since the Renaissance, the heavenly city of Augustine had been yielding to the earthly city as the sphere of greatest interest and concern. The Augustinian *saeculum senescens*—the age that was passing away—was indeed expiring, but not in the way Augustine expected.³ History itself, immanent and all-too-human, was again felt to be on the move. New things were thought possible by thinkers increasingly freed of reverence both for Christianity and for classical antiquity. A *novus ordo seclorum*, the initiation of a new order of the ages (the motto of the Great Seal of the United States) had begun. One could hope for the triumph of rational ideals effectuated through rational means.

The Enlightenment had given this shift in the geography of hope its most powerful intellectual justification. The idea of progress, inherent in one form or other in philosophy since antiquity, became an orienting concept for moderns.⁴ History was thought to be the gradual unfolding of a narrative of progress: world history represented the increasing maturation of humanity in the direction of greater liberty, knowledge (both abstract and applied), and justice. The view that history was a tale of progress need not be naive or lacking in nuance. Even its most enthusiastic proponents, such as Condorcet, who was both a proponent and a victim of the French Revolution, knew that very dark shadows accompanied the light. A belief in progress was compatible with grave doubts about the inexorability, irreversibility, or morality of the process. (The French Revolution might be a

³ Eric Voegelin, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, ed. Dante Germino, xvi. (= *Order in History*, iii) (Columbia, Miss.: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 211.

⁴ Scholars of the idea of progress differ over the genealogy of the concept. The classic work of J. B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Origin and Growth* (New York: Macmillan, 1932) argued that progress is a late medieval–modern concept unknown to the Greeks and Romans owing to the latter’s belief in historical degeneration (from a primordial Golden Age) and the cyclicity of time. This is a widespread view. Against this, see Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress*, 10–13. Without entering into the details of the scholarly controversy, it seems to me that Nisbet has the better view. The belief that the present age is superior to past ages, as well as the belief that the future will be better still was held by representative Greeks and Romans. The relation of this belief to hope for or faith in the future is another matter. It doesn’t follow from the belief that certain features of existence have improved or will continue to improve that an optimistic rather than a pessimistic outlook about the whole is warranted. As we have seen with pessimism in ch. 3, it need not entail the denial of progress in a particular department of life. Pessimism does entail, however, a denial of the beneficence of life as a whole. In this way, Greek and Roman assertions of progress may still be compatible with a tragic outlook. For a helpful and comprehensive analysis of the porosity of the concept of progress, see W. Warren Wagar, *Good Tidings: The Belief in Progress from Darwin to Marcuse* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1972), 3–10.

product of and impetus to progress, but it also devoured its own children.) Many of the Enlightenment *philosophes* believed, for example, that advancing affluence would bring habituation to luxuries that would in turn weaken and degrade those who enjoyed them. They were haunted by the ancient tragic wisdom that civilizations, like persons, go through a life cycle where flourishing youth is inevitably succeeded by decadence and death. The very optimistic Voltaire also wrote the despairing *Candide*.⁵ None the less, the Enlightenment, especially in its French version, sounded a new tone. Progress, however halting its steps or detrimental its side effects, established a net gain in human welfare. If in antiquity and the Middle Ages history was thought to be running down or standing still, in modernity each age was thought to be at least marginally better than the one before it.

In this chapter, we consider secular versions of hope bequeathed to us by the eighteenth-century French and German Enlightenment.⁶ We explore first two Enlightenment thinkers, the Marquis de Condorcet and Immanuel Kant, both of whom wrote on the conjunction of progress, politics, religion, and hope. We then look at two twentieth-century heirs of the Enlightenment, Ernst Bloch and Hannah Arendt. Bloch, a Marxist, is heir to the more extreme tendencies of the French Enlightenment; Arendt, of the moderate German and American versions. Condorcet and Kant exemplify the faith in progress. Bloch and Arendt, writing in the midst of a darker century, exemplify what is left of secular hope after the faith in progress has declined.

Condorcet

The Enlightenment did not invent the concept of progress; it gave it new grounds. The Puritans, for example, believed in the amelioration of human life in history ('pilgrim's progress') under the influence of

⁵ Gay captures well Voltaire's confidence in and ambivalence about progress: 'But while Voltaire's predictions fluctuated, they circled around a hard core of conviction: life is, has always been, and will always be, hard; man needs courage, patience, and luck to survive at all; but reason, often flouted, often defeated, is a tough and aggressive force in the world, and it was now at last making progress slowly, painfully, with many setbacks but also with good prospects of ultimate success.' Reason would facilitate 'the honest recognition of harsh truths [that] might enable men to make the future less harsh; open-eyed pessimism was the precondition for sensible optimism'. *The Enlightenment*, ii, 104–5.

⁶ On the contemporary scholarly pluralization of the Enlightenment, as well as an argument for a uniquely British (not only Scottish) version of it, see Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Roads to Modernity: The British, French and American Enlightenment* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004).

divine guidance.⁷ Eighteenth-century *philosophes*, however, believed that progress was based solely on reason's capacity to distinguish truth from error and thus advance science so as to direct history towards noble ends. While the ancients pondered whether virtue can be taught and Christians thought human melioration was forever limited by sin, modernists held that individuals could be improved by education and that societies could be improved by sagacious constitutions. Politics could effectuate enlightenment. Statecraft could secure 'perpetual peace'. Human agency can and should be the *sole* ground of human hope. The Enlightenment solidified a basic shift against the ancient tragic orientation, on the one hand, and against Jewish and Christian theological hope, on the other. The grounds for this astonishing confidence were provided, according to believers in progress, by history itself.

In *Esquisse (Outline of a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind)*, Condorcet asserts that an exploration of human history supports the 'strongest motives for believing that nature has assigned no limit to our hopes'.⁸ For

nature has assigned no limit to the perfecting of the human faculties . . . the perfectibility of man is truly indefinite . . . the progress of this perfectibility, henceforth independent of any power that might wish to arrest it, has no other limit than the duration of the globe on which nature has placed us.⁹

What accounts for this extraordinarily sanguine reading of history? How could one reasonably conclude that history supports an open prospect of human perfection rather than decline, repetition, entropy, or the destruction of civilizations? Condorcet's confidence in the upward swing of history is based on his confidence in reason to discover and advance truth. (The emphasis on reason was central to the French Enlightenment. The *Encyclopédie* affirmed that 'Reason is

⁷ For an analysis of the multifaceted Puritan understanding of progress, see Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress*, 124–39.

⁸ A translation of the preface and introduction to Condorcet's *Esquisse* is found in Frederick J. Teggart and George H. Hildebrand (eds.), *The Idea of Progress: A Collection of Readings* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif.: University of California Press, 1949), 338. For commentaries on Condorcet's *Esquisse*, see Gay and Nisbet. Technical questions such as Condorcet's relationship to the views of Montesquieu and Turgot cannot be treated here but are taken up in the literature.

⁹ Condorcet in Teggart and Hildebrand, *The Idea of Progress*, 323.

to the *philosophe* what Grace is to the Christian'.¹⁰) The unfolding of the ten epochs of history, in Condorcet's periodization, tracks the march of reason. In the ninth epoch—the present era—this trend is especially pronounced. The advance of science and technology and the retreat of religion and superstition are creating a platform for a new millennium.

Condorcet traces the progress of humanity from hypothetical beginnings in a state of nature through successive ages of discovery, invention, refinement, and rationalization. These form a continuous narrative of progress: 'From the period when alphabetical writing was known in Greece, history is linked with our own century, with the existing state of the human race in the most enlightened countries of Europe, by an uninterrupted series of events and observations; and the picture of the advancement and progress of the human mind has become truly historical.'¹¹ A sound exposition of the vector of historical progress through the ages will provide the basis for prediction of the future shape of progress. A science of the future—which will not only predict the likely outcome of humanity's historical rise but will direct and hasten its progress—is within our grasp. A study of past revolutions in human progress will equip us to effectuate and enjoy the last great revolution—the secular millennium, as it were. The aim of Condorcet's philosophy is therefore to

trace . . . our hopes [for] the progress reserved for future generations . . . It will be necessary to show here by what degrees that which probably appears to us today as but a chimerical hope may gradually become possible, and even easy; why, in spite of the momentary success of prejudices, and the support they receive from the corruption of governments or of peoples, truth alone can enjoy a lasting triumph.¹²

In a trope originating at least as far back as Augustine, Condorcet conceives of each epoch of history as a struggle between opposing principles, in this case between truth and superstition, reason and religion. As humanity awakened from the barbarism of the state of nature and societies formed and diversified with the division of labour, a class of men arose that guarded the evolving learning of the early

¹⁰ Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert, *Encyclopédie*, 17 vols. (Paris and Neuchâtel, 1751–65), xii. 509 (cited Himmelfarb, *The Roads to Modernity*, 18).

¹¹ Condorcet in Teggart and Hildebrand, *The Idea of Progress*, 326.

¹² *Ibid.* 326–7.

human groups. The learned class both advanced knowledge *and* disseminated error, 'enriching the sciences with new truths, but precipitating the people into ignorance and religious servitude, causing some passing benefits to be bought at the price of a long and shameful tyranny'.¹³ The priests, whether pagan or Christian, Western or Eastern, monopolize learning. They advance it and they retard it simultaneously. History prior to the ninth epoch, which is marked by a salutary open warfare against religion, displays this melancholy dialectic. Thus, for almost all of history, humanity was separated

into two portions: the one destined to teach, the other to believe: the one proudly concealing what it boasts of knowing, the other receiving respectfully what one condescends to reveal to it; the one wishing to rise above reason, the other humbly renouncing its own, and debasing itself below humanity, by acknowledging in other men prerogatives superior to their common nature.¹⁴

This sharp and invidious (and apparently universal) dichotomy endures, Condorcet asserts, into the eighteenth century, when the tides, at last, are turning.

The priests of all ages asserted their authority over other human beings both on the basis of their knowledge (as literate persons and custodians of the learning of their cultures) and on a more wicked basis: they perfected the 'art of deceiving men in order to rob them, and of usurping over their opinions an authority founded on chimerical fears and hopes'.¹⁵ This is an old theme, found at least as early as the Roman Epicurean poet, Lucretius. Condorcet has elevated it into a motive force of history. The Enlightenment will erase the *infâmie* of religion once and for all and substitute a solid and humane hope for the 'chimerical hopes' of the ages of superstition. What then may we *rationaly* hope for in the future, according to Condorcet? 'Our hopes regarding the future state of humanity', he writes 'can be reduced to these three important points: the destruction of inequality between nations; the progress of equality within one and the same nation; and, finally, the real perfecting of mankind'.¹⁶ Implementation of this trinity of hopes will constitute the arrival of the secular millennium, of a truly democratic age. How shall this come about?

Condorcet's overriding concern is to achieve human equality. As far as possible, differences between the sexes, between the wealthy and the

¹³ Ibid. 331.

¹⁴ Ibid. 332.

¹⁵ Ibid. 334.

¹⁶ Ibid. 336-7.

working classes (as well as the poor), between the Europeans and the denizens of their colonies, and finally between the discredited priestly caste and everyone else, must be minimized or eliminated. This is to be brought about through a vast democratization of education—that is, through the spread of enlightened secular rationality, as well as through sagacious economic policy and political measures. A founder of economics, Condorcet observes the malign influence of vast disparities of wealth in society and seeks to protect the non-affluent through, essentially, a system of public and private social security insurance. He envisions a taxation scheme that redistributes money to indigent old persons and so minimizes the dread and insecurity that come with age and imbue social life as heretofore lived with a constant undercurrent of anxiety. In tandem with growing economic equality—which will also be promoted by the accelerating growth of science, technology, and population—will come growing equality in education. There will always be geniuses of the rank of a Newton; there will always be discrepancies in human talent. None the less, a broadly diffused, rationally constructed system of instruction will give everyone what they need to know to manage their own affairs, achieve happiness, perfect their intellects to the extent possible for them, and resist the temptation of backsliding into religious superstition. As knowledge multiplies, more parsimonious and inclusive principles for organizing it are also discovered. We will never therefore be overwhelmed by our knowledge. There is no natural limit to what we can know.

Nor is there any limit to what the application of our knowledge in technology will achieve. Condorcet speculates that life-extending techniques will one day be available to medical science. Although death will not be abolished, life will be greatly extended. Our manner of life—diet, exercise, working conditions—will grow progressively healthier. Agriculture will become more reliable and productive as science advances. The earth will be able to support an ever larger population. (Malthus wrote, in part, in reaction against Condorcet.)

It is not the case that our progress will only be material and that the old Adam, the ‘human stain’, will remain. No: there will be progress in morals as well. Immoral conduct, in Condorcet’s view, stems from a mistaken appraisal of one’s self-interest. With pervasive education, human beings will be better able to ‘instruct themselves in the nature and development of their moral sentiments, in the principles of ethics and the natural motives for conforming their actions thereto, in their

interests, whether as individuals or as members of society . . .¹⁷ The necessary consequence of a well-directed study of morality under conditions of increasing equality will be a growth in fellow feeling, on the one hand, and in acceptance of impartial justice, on the other. We will come to see our fellow's welfare as equivalent to or at least compatible with our own. Given our equality with one another, we will see impartial justice as the guarantor of that equality: all will willingly submit to it. Condorcet assumes, like Rousseau, that human beings are basically good—nature has 'planted in all hearts' 'enlightened benevolence' and 'delicate and generous sensibility'. These only need to grow 'under the genial influence of knowledge and liberty'.¹⁸

The last point—that liberty is needed for humans to improve morally—is important. Condorcet, his scientific utopianism notwithstanding, is not a proto-Marxist. He remains, broadly speaking, a liberal democratic thinker. Liberty is a value, despite his emphasis on equality. Part of the reason for his stress on education is so that persons can manage their own lives and govern their own affairs—that is, maintain their liberty. In order for morals to be corrected and virtue to flourish, a proper constitution is required. The innate good of humanity must be reinforced by laws that 'conform to the will of reason and of nature'.¹⁹ Rational laws, which would assume the aboriginal liberality and equality of human beings, would 'produce, finally, what has hitherto been only a dream, national manners of a gentle and blameless character, built, not on proud privations, on hypocritical appearances, on reservations imposed by fear of shame or religious terrors, but on habits freely contracted, inspired by nature, and avowed by reason'.²⁰ Ideally, citizens are free contractors who identify their self-interest with a common good to which they have, on rational grounds, become devoted.

A final movement in this symphony of progress is the abolition of war and the achievement of confederal arrangements between nations. 'Perpetual confederations are the only means of maintaining' the independence and liberty of nations. Governments will come to realize that they 'cannot become conquerors without sacrificing their own freedom'.²¹ A consensus will develop as to how to moderate

¹⁷ Ibid. 350.¹⁸ Ibid.¹⁹ Ibid. 351.²⁰ Ibid. 352.²¹ Ibid.

conflicts, especially conflicts with economic causes, between nations. Democratization, economic globalization, development, human rights, international confederations based on shared interests and a common good—Condorcet has essentially sketched the economic, social, and political project of the West in the post-war period.

Nothing short of human perfectibility—an infinite horizon of hope—stands before us.

The real advantages which must result from the progress, an almost certain hope for which has just been demonstrated, can have no limit other than the absolute perfection of the human race, because, in proportion as different kinds of equality shall be established through vaster means of providing for our wants, more universal instruction, and more complete liberty, the more real will this equality become, and the nearer will it be to embracing all that truly concerns the happiness of mankind.²²

It is, perhaps, a chilling anticipation of the unintended consequences of these hopes that the Marquis de Condorcet was hunted down by the Revolution that he himself supported. He died in a Jacobin prison, either by his own hand or by that of a murderer, in advance of what would have been his execution by guillotine.²³

The French version of the Enlightenment, represented here by Condorcet, was more blunt in its rejection of traditional religious elements—and more forthright in its secularization of them—than other versions of the Enlightenment. Condorcet embodies the fullest hopes for enlightened human agency; the fullest rationalization and demystification of history. History is not mysterious or intractable: it is a realm of human making and can be shaped by enlightened men and women such that it becomes a properly human home. The hope that resides in a system such as this continues to echo among contemporary secularists, particularly those inclined towards scientific and technological resolutions of the human condition. But, given the breakdown of the belief in progress, it cannot translate, without deep modifications, into the twenty-first century. We who look back on world wars, genocides, and a Holocaust and who look ahead to a natural world perhaps irreparably and malignly altered by human

²² Condorcet in Teggart and Hildebrand, *The Idea of Progress*, 344.

²³ For a profound meditation on the at once exhilarating and debilitating sense of historical inevitability as perceived by the agents of revolution, see Arendt, *On Revolution*, 40–52.

technological activity cannot share Condorcet's hope, at least without a host of qualifications so great as to transform and kill it. Condorcet's hope, along with those of other French *philosophes* and revolutionaries, seems betrayed by the very European—indeed modern and global—history it sought to redeem. By contrast, the German Enlightenment, which did not develop as strong an anti-clericalism as did the French, continued to take religion and the traditions of the past seriously and so moderated its lust for the new. The German engagement with both the secular and, *mutatis mutandis*, the sacred brought greater possibility of restraint—not always actualized, to be sure—to their hope for history and politics. Kant, the premier German Enlightenment thinker, is an exemplary figure here. His attempt to work out a secular answer to the question 'what may I hope for?' cannot jettison the religious baggage of the past. The Kantian strategy was to reshape rather than to reject religion. That strategy was followed by all subsequent religious modernists, lending Kant a perennial relevance.

Kant

Unlike Condorcet (and the French *philosophes* generally) Immanuel Kant was unable to abandon the concerns of piety. To be sure, he abandoned the traditional beliefs of the Church, not to mention the practices of Christian faith. (It is said that as Rector of the University of Königsberg when he had to lead the academic procession he stepped aside and went home as the rest of the professors walked into the chapel.) He retained, however, the deepest moral concerns of traditional piety and developed them in a philosophical vernacular to an extraordinary degree. To read Kant's hymn to duty in *Critique of Practical Reason* or his many almost mystical celebrations of the moral law is to encounter a soul still entranced by a pietistic ethic of holiness, inner purity, and yearning for communion with God.²⁴ The moral law plays a role in Kant's system of ethics and metaphysics similar to the role of God in a theistic moral system. Indeed, Kant famously derives a warranted belief in God, as well as in the immortality of the soul, from the logic of the demands of the moral law. Although his *Critique of Pure*

²⁴ See, e.g., Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Library of Liberal Arts, 1993), 90.

Reason shut the door on traditional metaphysical claims about the Divine Being, *Critique of Practical Reason* returns theistic faith—albeit in a radically reconfigured manner—to rational status. Similarly, his writings on history reintroduce—again in a straightened and critical fashion—ancient monotheistic ideas such as Creation and Providence. Worlds away from the optimistic and therefore shallow-sounding Condorcet, as well as from Leibniz or Spinoza, Kant dwells on a thinly secularized version of human sin, which he calls ‘radical evil’. Radical evil infects everything humans do, eviscerating any facile hope for human betterment or belief in progress. In one of his more memorable estimates of the human prospect, he wrote that ‘out of such crooked timber as man is made, nothing entirely straight can be built’.²⁵ Kant’s philosophy carries on the work of religion by other means.

Given Kant’s pervasive if eccentric religiosity, what justifies including him in a chapter on secular hope? Kant was, one might say, a man of faith, but his faith was in the highest possibilities of the human. He wrote in the preface to the second edition of *Critique of Pure Reason*: ‘I have found it necessary to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith. The dogmatism of metaphysics is the source of all that unbelief, always very dogmatic, which wars against morality’ (B xxx). Kant set out to destroy traditional metaphysics, with its proofs for the existence of God, its assertions about an immortal human soul destined for punishment or bliss in an afterlife, and its arguments about the creation vs. the eternity of the world, in order clear the ground for faith. Faith would be strengthened by the removal of all the shabby philosophical architecture that had been built to prop it up since antiquity. But, what sort of faith would remain? For Kant, the only voice of God that one can hear or should want to hear is the voice of the moral law. The moral law and the good will that seeks to do its duty for no reason other than the glory of the moral law itself is what holiness means for human beings. The dogmatism of metaphysics aids and abets fantastic ecclesiastical and ceremonial religions, full of superstition and conducive to fanaticism. The pure moral faith that Kant identifies with religion ‘within the limits of reason alone’ needs none of that. The critical project then is pervasively concerned with

²⁵ Kant, ‘Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht’, in *Was ist Aufklärung? Aufsätze zur Geschichte und Philosophie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 46 (translation my own).

religious faith, but it proposes a religious faith that is, on a historical level at least, discontinuous with traditional Christianity or Judaism. The infinite moral task that Kant lays before humanity is a purely human task. The hope to which humans are entitled within the limits of reason is grounded on the efficacy of their own action. Humanity itself is part of the grounds of such a hope 'since at every stage Kant restated that we must do everything as if it depended on us alone'.²⁶

Kant's writing on the nature and limits of legitimate hope falls within two domains: the analysis of history (that is, whether history reveals progress towards human betterment) and the analysis of holiness (that is, whether human beings can achieve a kind of moral salvation as individuals). Kant thus replicates the bifocal concern of traditional theism for historical eschatology as well as for personal salvation. What we may hope for thus concerns whether we are justified, as a race, in believing that a just social and political life will someday prevail among us and whether we are justified, as individuals, in believing that some day we will reach a holy perfection of our natures.²⁷

Kant's reading of history, like Condorcet's, intuits a steady progress, pushed dialectically by persistent human evil in conflict with a persistent will to obey the moral law.²⁸ While in Condorcet humanity was divided into a malevolent religious caste and a majority of more or less willing dupes, for Kant (in whom a Lutheran current ran deep) we are divided against ourselves. He does not single out any caste or interest for blame; we are all part of the crooked timber of humanity. Kant's speculation on history is found in several essays. Let us consider his sketch, 'Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View', as our primary text and seek further clarification in the other pieces. The ostensible point of departure for the sketch is whether it is warranted to organize a global (by which he means Western) history of humanity in terms of a narrative of progress. Does all of the immense

²⁶ Michel Despland, *Kant on History and Religion* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1973), 278.

²⁷ The centrality of the problem of hope for Kant is indicated by his own raising of the question in the conclusion to the *Critique of Pure Reason* (A 804): 'The whole concern of my reason, both speculative and practical, comes together in the following three questions: 1. What can I know? 2. What must I do? 3. What can I hope for?'

²⁸ The idea that conflict of the most fundamental kind drives history towards redemption is at least as old as Augustine, for whom the tension between the City of God and the City of Man is basic. See Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress*, 71-3.

detail of thousands of years of history belie a pattern or is it only a random, chaotic, meaningless, and tragic series of events? Kant believes that we are justified, even intellectually compelled, to find a meaningful pattern in history. Indeed, the discrimination of this pattern is part of the work of advancing and implementing it. History can be shown to have a direction, a telos. Once discerned and grasped in a conscious manner, historical teleology nurtures human moral and political effort. Our hope for a future just society becomes a force in its own right. Philosophy becomes 'chiliastic' (Eighth Proposition).²⁹

The history of humanity, Kant asserts, 'encourages the hope that, after many revolutions, with all their transforming effects, the highest purpose of nature, a universal cosmopolitan existence, will at last be realized as the matrix within which all the original capacities of the human race may develop' (Eighth Proposition).³⁰ History, as the play of human wills, looks chaotic. However, nature, in producing human beings as creatures with will (that is, as creatures capable of purposive practical thought and action) has a method to her apparent madness. The argument, developed in the course of nine propositions, runs as follows. Nature does nothing superfluous or otiose. All the capacities implanted in creatures, including ourselves, by nature are destined to unfold in the course of time (First Proposition). The full development of our distinctively human capacity, reason, is a species-wide affair (Second Proposition). No individual person can develop the capacity for reason to its ideal limit. That process of development constitutes civilization. Human beings have been deprived by nature of instinct such that they must, both literally and figuratively, build a habitable and human world in which to live (Third Proposition). That is necessarily a shared, ongoing process in which the whole species, over time, is involved. The means that nature uses to advance this process is 'mutual antagonism' among humans, what Kant, memorably, calls 'unsocial sociability' (*ungesellige Geselligkeit*).³¹ What Kant has in mind is the rather Hobbesian idea that human beings both need to

²⁹ Immanuel Kant, 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose', in H. S. Reiss (ed.), *Kant: Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 50. Kant's essay is organized into nine propositions and commentaries. For ease of reference, I note the numbered proposition in line.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 51. For a detailed analysis of this Kantian text, see William A. Galston, *Kant and the Problem of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), ch. 5.

³¹ Kant, 'Idee zu einen allgemeinen Geschichte', 43.

enter into a social compact for their own survival and yet (owing to their own ‘crooked timber’) continue to resist the claims of society upon them. The inclination to associate and the resistance to association once society has been launched make human beings ever restless, ever striving. Following Rousseau, Kant sees organized society begin in both dependence and rivalry. Without selfishness and arrogance—without unsocial sociability—men might have lived ‘an Arcadian, pastoral existence of perfect concord, self-sufficiency and mutual love. But all human talents would remain hidden forever in a dormant state, and men, as good natured as the sheep they tended, would scarcely render their existence more valuable than that of their animals’.³² Kant continues in an almost hymnic way:

Nature should thus be thanked for fostering social incompatibility, enviously competitive vanity, and insatiable desires for possession or even power. Without these desires, all man’s excellent natural capacities would never be roused to develop. Man wishes concord, but nature, knowing better what is good for his species, wishes discord . . . The natural impulses which make this possible, the sources of the very unsociableness and continual resistance which cause so many evils, at the same time encourage man towards new exertion of his powers, and thus towards further development of his natural capacities. They would thus seem to indicate the design of a wise Creator—not, as it might seem, the hand of a malicious spirit who had meddled in the creator’s glorious work or spoiled it out of envy.³³

Nature has set us on a course where we are ‘hard wired to connect’ with one another but also foreordained to oppose one another.³⁴ Progress (with apologies to Yeats) begins where all the ladders start—in the foul rag and bone shop of the heart. The history of human antagonism, far from disconfirming a natural or divine design of history, rather gives evidence of it. God, not a demon, it seems, has given history its dialectic. (Precisely how much weight to give these ostensibly religious allusions of Kant’s we shall consider presently.)

The aboriginal practical problem of humanity is a political problem: ‘attaining a civil society which can administer justice universally’³⁵ (Fifth Proposition). Human beings in their unsocial sociability need a

³² Id., ‘Idea for a Universal History’, in Reiss, *Kant: Political Writings*, 45.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Institute for American Values, *Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities* (New York: Institute for American Values, 2003).

³⁵ Kant, ‘Idea for a Universal History’, 45.

master, but any master would also be human; would also inevitably work for his self-interest and subvert the common good. Thus, humanity has an inherent political problem. History can be viewed as a protracted attempt to solve this problem. History is the history of constitutional experiments, of the ongoing human quest for just political order, which entails ‘establishing a society in which *freedom under external laws* would be combined to the greatest possible extent with irresistible force, in other words of establishing a perfectly *just civil constitution*’.³⁶ Kant envisions a republican or constitutional monarchic (not necessarily democratic) society characterized by a high degree of personal freedom, in such areas as thought and religion, as the political ideal. But a just constitutional order is never a purely internal affair. The international situation affects the internal situation of every nation.

Recalling that Kant’s title used the term ‘cosmopolitan’ (*weltbürgerlich*), we now see its significance. Kant asserts that the internal problem of a just constitutional arrangement is inextricably related to the external problem of relations among states (Seventh Proposition). When the large-scale political groupings which human beings have formed are always in conflict with each other, the internal situation of each state is always one of preparing for war. Life under the cloud of constant war fails to achieve the conditions of a life worth living. Thus, the same conditions that drove human beings out of the state of nature into the unsocial sociability of political society further drive individual nations into a great compact of states (a *Völkerbund* or *Foedus Amphictionum*). Kant sees the emergence of a league of nations—further elaborated in his treatise, *Perpetual Peace*—as an inevitable eventuality. Rather than a visionary Utopia, federal arrangements between nations will be a necessary condition for human survival. Federal arrangements between states will allow the perfection of constitutions within states ‘till finally, partly by an optimal internal arrangement of the civil constitution, and partly by common external agreement and legislation, a state of affairs is created, which, like a civil commonwealth, can maintain itself automatically’³⁷ (Seventh Proposition).

Here we come to Kant’s worldly hope for human betterment within history. Humans are entitled to look forward to a just and humane political order, both domestically and internationally. What

³⁶ Kant, ‘Idea for a Universal History’, 45–6.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 48.

warrants such a hope? How can Kant claim that this is the inner purpose of nature, a virtually providential process of progress? How can one maintain such a position given both the critique of metaphysics (which should have ruled out such speculations about the mysterious inner purposes of nature) and the radical reformation of traditional faith (which should exclude a dogmatic confidence in an ultimate divine guarantee of human welfare—such as, for example, God promised Noah after the flood (Gen. 9: 11))? Kant faces up to the possibility that perhaps this rational and just ordering of societies and nations will never come about,

that things will remain as they have always been, and that it would thus be impossible to predict whether the discord which is so natural to our species is not preparing the way for a hell of evils to overtake us, however civilized our condition, in that nature, by barbaric devastation, might perhaps again destroy this civilized state and all the cultural progress hitherto achieved . . .³⁸

Yet, he rejects this. What permits him, by his own lights, to repudiate this desperate conclusion is his belief that a special ‘wisdom’ is covertly assumed to underlie the system of nature.

But, why assume this on any grounds other than those of traditional theism? Kant argues by way of a rhetorical question. Is it rational, he asks, to recognize harmony and design in parts of nature and deny these features to the whole of nature? Nature cannot be purposive in its parts and purposeless as a whole. Nature as a whole displays teleological order. Every apparently errant feature contributes to the harmony of the whole. So, too, in human history: savagery, war, and unsocial sociability have fuelled the development of civilization. History, like Goethe’s Mephistopheles, is ‘a portion of that power which always works for Evil but affects Good’. There is a net gain in goodness over time. But, this still seems to beg the question or flirt with the fallacy of composition.³⁹ What we sense in the part need not hold true for the whole.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ The fallacy of composition, a classic deductive fallacy, concludes that a class has a property because every one of its members has that property. From the fact that every player on a team is excellent one is not entitled to conclude that the team is excellent. From the fact that some parts of nature reveal a pattern, we are not justified to conclude that nature as a whole reveals the same pattern. See Wesley C. Salmon, *Logic* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1973), 52. For a profound meditation on the relation of the part (i.e. the individual event) to the whole (i.e. the presumptive process of history), see

How then do we know that nature is harmonious or that it has a 'hidden plan', the ultimate expression of which is a just, well-ordered human world where harmonious relations among and within states go hand in hand with the cultivation of moral individuals? Kant, frustratingly, leaves questions about the inner character or teleological thrust of nature unanswered in 'Idea for a Universal History'. He discusses them at length, however, in his third Critique, *Critique of Judgement* of 1790. That work dealt extensively with teleology, that is, with the issue of purposiveness in nature.⁴⁰ If we apply the doctrine of the third Critique to 'Idea for a Universal History' we come to see that the ascription of purpose and telos to nature is an idea that reason provides in the process of sense-making. Purpose and goal are not features of nature as it is 'in itself'.

Nature, in *Critique of Judgement*, discloses itself to the human understanding under inter alia the category of cause. Causation is strictly mechanical. Causes precede their effects. The Aristotelian and medieval understanding of teleology, of final causation, does not belong to the categories of the understanding. None the less, teleology does belong to reason. It is an ineluctable idea of reason, a schema for organizing our concepts of nature which derive from the understanding at the highest level. When we reflect on the mind's work of making sense of nature we discover that we cannot do so without teleological ideas however alien those ideas are to the immediate work of the understanding. There, only mechanical (i.e., efficient) causality applies. Once we become aware of the ineluctability of rational teleology we can appreciate teleological schemas for what they are worth: they tell us nothing about the world; they tell us everything about reason's role in sense-making.

Kant thus envisages a two-tier programme of scientific sense-making with respect to nature. On the bottom tier (the tier of 'determinant judgement') is the empirical process of seeking out mechanical causes for objects, states, events, etc. This is the primary work of science and must proceed without metaphysical impediments thrown in its path by

Hannah Arendt, 'The Concept of History', *Between Past and Future* (New York: Viking Press, 1961), 63–6, 82.

⁴⁰ Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. H. Bernard, (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2005). The second half of the *Critique* is entitled 'Critique of the Teleological Judgement'.

speculative reason. On the top tier (the tier of ‘reflective judgement’⁴¹) speculative reason finds that it must integrate all of the discrete causal accounts generated by natural science into what we today would call a meta-narrative. This meta-narrative will necessarily have a teleological form; nature will appear to be thoroughly purposive, goal directed. That appearance, however satisfying it might be to reason or however heuristic it might be for further conceptual exploration, does not describe the world-in-itself: it is a work of synthesizing reason. There is a rational pressure to imbue nature with a purposive character.

Once we grant that purposiveness in nature is a creature of reason—a perspective warranted by its heuristic benefits—we run up against the limit Kant imposes on metaphysics. Our minds may need the imputation of purpose in order to make sense of the data fixed by both experience and the sciences, but nature, in herself, as it were, has no purpose. No purpose, at least, that we can know. We cannot make any material claims about the goal-directedness of the world per se.⁴² And yet, that is precisely what Kant seems to be doing in the ‘Idea for a Universal History’. The solution, it seems to me, is that the ascription of purpose to nature, and subsequently to history, must be understood as an invitation to adopt a perspective, not as a putatively perspective-independent description of reality. (The question, after all, is what *may* not what *must* we hope for?) Kant weighs the benefits and costs of considering history as a progressive movement within a purposive plan of nature versus history-as-a-meaningless-chaos. When history is viewed as founded upon the assumption of a ‘plan of nature’ we are given

grounds for greater hopes. For such a plan opens up the comforting prospect of a future in which we are shown from afar how the human race eventually works its way upward to a situation in which all the germs implanted by nature can be developed fully, and in which man’s destiny can be fulfilled here on earth.⁴³

⁴¹ For a crisp description of these two types of judgement, see William James Booth, *Interpreting the World: Kant’s Philosophy of History and Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 36: ‘In determinant judgement, the act of judging consists in the application of a known principle to a set of particular circumstances or facts. Judgement is here required to supply no concepts of its own; it is rather a relation, or function, by which one kind of data is brought to bear on another. But in those cases where no principle is supplied, the faculty of judgement must supply its own, and, according to Kant, the only standard it can employ in selecting this principle is the requirements of judging itself.’ For the primary text, see Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 11–13.

⁴² Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, para. 70 (p. 175).

⁴³ Id., ‘Idea for a Universal History’, in Reiss, *Kant: Political Writings*, 52.

It is our choice whether to adopt such a view or not. If we do adopt it, we acquire a powerful motive (*Bewegensgrund*) for our further work in the world. (What could be more powerfully motivating than the conviction that some day the world will live in peace and every human being will have the chance to flourish?) If we do not adopt this belief, we will be crushed under despair, or forced, at best, to channel our hopes into otherworldliness. 'Such a spectacle would force us to turn away in revulsion, and, by making us despair of ever finding any completed rational aim behind it, would reduce us to hoping for it only in some other world'.⁴⁴

Kant is arguing that hope in a future of progressive social, political, indeed, moral amelioration is warranted. But what, in the end, warrants this cluster of beliefs? If it is our choice whether to construe history as a meta-narrative of progress or as a tale told by an idiot, on what grounds would we choose one version over the other? If hope were not already a virtue for Kant, for whom, despite the anti-theological cast of the critical project a deep current of Christianity is still alive and well, why should one choose it? Why isn't Kantian hope merely a species of wishful thinking or a leap of faith that runs beyond any evidence in support of it? The evidence that Kant adduces for purpose in nature and progress in history (however we settle the epistemological question of how we can know whether our interpretation is warranted) is hardly decisive. Occasionally, he relies on empirical arguments. He argues, for example, that the French Revolution was based on moral ideals and has established a new benchmark in the public realization of justice from which mankind will never again retreat. (This is less a claim about future history than about future memory: the recognition of what human beings can achieve with respect to justice will not be lost from the consciousness of civilization.⁴⁵) But, as with any argument based on empirical evidence, it can be falsified on empirical grounds. The Holocaust, one might argue, falsifies Kant's claim. Nor do his a priori arguments fare any better. From the very first proposition (that the capacities nature has implanted in her creatures are determined (*sind bestimmt*) to reach their fulfilment) we might well ask: 'determined by whom?' Kant has not

⁴⁴ Id., 'Idea for a Universal History', in Reiss, *Kant: Political Writings*, 53.

⁴⁵ Kant, 'An old question raised again: is the human race constantly progressing?' in Beck (ed.), *Kant: On History* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001), 147.

established (nor could he on his own principles establish) the existence of a determiner or of his, her, or its design. The impression of circular reasoning is hard to dispel.

Kant arrives at a hope-giving, progressive, or providential portrayal of history for reasons similar to his affirmation of freedom, God, and immortality: the moral law requires it. In Kant's view we know, from our common experience as moral agents, that the claims of morality transcend those of self-interest, passion, instinct, drive, pleasure, and pain. It is implicit in the very idea of morality that a moral law governs every rational agent in a universal manner. As members of the kingdom of nature, we are beings governed by causation. Our bodies are no different from other physical bodies. And yet, we are also aware of ourselves as subjects, as beings capable of freedom. We are, as subjects, in some manner exempt from the laws of physics and the hard chain of necessity that attends physical causation. When we view ourselves as moral agents we understand that freedom is also necessary if there is to be morality. Pure reason, in its deployment towards the will (rather than towards the speculative intellect), discovers a moral law which requires freedom *and* grounds it. When we view ourselves as the human beings we actually are, we discover the 'causality of freedom'; we discover that freedom must exist as a condition for the moral agency that we evidently do enjoy. We discover as well that God and immortality have a kind of reality. The moral law can only be lawful for beings that can fulfil it—'ought' implies 'can'. For ought to imply can the universe has to be so arranged that our efforts at fulfilment will have an effect.⁴⁶ Nature has ultimately to support our agency. Similarly, there is no gainsaying the amount of time that it will take for us to purify our will sufficiently to act only on account of the moral law. An infinite timeline is required, hence the inference of immortality.⁴⁷ Kant is not thereby reimporting the old, pre-critical metaphysics back into his philosophy. He is, rather, postulating that certain conditions must hold in order for the moral law to exercise its authority. Freedom, God, and immortality are postulates of practical reason, not substantive metaphysical claims.

⁴⁶ 'Therefore, the highest good is possible in the world only on the supposition of a supreme cause of nature which has causality corresponding to the moral disposition.' For the complete argument for the existence of God as a postulate of pure practical reason, see Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 130–8.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 128–30.

The hope-giving, hope-sustaining beliefs about human history, on the one hand, and individual immortality, on the other, that Kant bids us accept are necessary if we are to be proper moral agents. From the fact (and Kant emphatically thinks it is a fact) that the moral law exists we are justified in believing various things that dispose us to fulfil it. Hope for Kant is well grounded on the only metaphysical reality that can be known with a priori certainty: the moral law. The individual's movement towards fulfilling the moral law, towards becoming a holy will, a will at every instant in conformity to the moral law, requires agency over infinite time, hence immortality. None the less, immortality is not quite a locus of hope for Kant in the sense that it is for a traditional Jew or Christian, who envisions some kind of post-mortem existence in heaven. Presumably, the traditional religious belief entails an assumption of eternal joy, reunion with loved ones, just desert—happiness of the most sublime sort. None of this holds for Kant. Immortality is not happiness: it is a condition in which we may become *worthy* of happiness by ever narrowing the gap between our will and our duty.⁴⁸ Immortality signals the opportunity for applying ourselves to the infinite task of holiness. Immortality, rather like Dante's *Purgatorio*, is a scene of continued striving but never of arriving. If there is an ultimate destination beyond an individual's work to achieve a good will, it is known only to God.

And on the basis of his previous progress from the worse to the morally better . . . he may hope for a further uninterrupted continuance of this progress, however long his existence may last, even beyond this life. But he cannot hope here or at any foreseeable point of his future existence to be fully adequate to God's will, without indulgence or remission which would not harmonize with justice. This he can do only in the infinity of his duration which God alone can survey.⁴⁹

For this reason, although Kant speaks of hope in conjunction with immortality, his main teaching on hope, it seems to me, is reserved for history and politics. Hope has a public, collective object: the achievement of justice within and among states. Kant believes that history is

⁴⁸ '[I]f we inquire into God's final end in creating the world, we must name not the happiness of rational beings in the world but the highest good, which adds a further condition to the wish of rational beings to be happy, viz, the condition of being worthy of happiness, which is the morality of these beings, for this alone contains the standard by which they can hope to participate in happiness at the hand of a wise creator.' *Ibid.* 137.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 130.

on its way towards that outcome. But, we are no closer to finding the justification for his confidence unless we want to see it, in a mere biographical sense, as a holdover from his Christianity. What is the warrant for adopting a hopeful perspective, a progressive interpretation of history as a teleological process? Is it simply an interpretive choice or is there a compelling reason, as there is in the case of natural teleology, to adopt it? It may be the case that the question of whether history is teleological affords us interpretative latitude. We really do have a choice between hope for and despair of human progress. Kant's language itself suggests this. In this case, the choice is almost arbitrary and so groundless. But, consider another approach. On the narrower question of whether practical reason is justified in positing an object (the achievement of the highest good—that is, the conjunction of duty and happiness) Kant holds that reason *requires* such a belief. It is in the nature of practical reason—that is, of reason as applied to will—to have an object. (Will is always intentional, by definition. One cannot intend nothing.)

[T]he necessity of an ultimate end posited by pure reason and comprehending the totality of all ends within a single principle (i.e., a world in which the highest possible good can be realized with our collaboration) is a necessity experienced by the unselfish will as it *rises beyond* mere obedience to formal laws and creates as its own object the highest good.⁵⁰

We cannot help but intend a perfection of the world as the ultimate end of our moral striving. *It is implicit in practical reason to hope for a consummation, in which justice and goodness, duty and happiness, cohere both for individuals and for societies. Postulating such an object of hope is a consequence of what it means to be rational, in a practical, that is, moral sense.*

If we must order our compliance with duty, with the moral law, by a hopeful vision of a perpetually peaceful world as the object of our striving, does that warrant construing history as a process converging on that end? It does not. At best it is a claim about how we ought to think about history, not about the process of history per se. If we reify history and see it as something more than the sum of the human actions that compose it we go astray in attributing characteristics, like moral progress, to it. Thus, Kant, his language notwithstanding, tries to avoid reifying history and ascribing characteristics to it as a whole, such as

⁵⁰ Reiss, *Kant: Political Writings*, 65.

progress. Kant preserves for individuals and states the ability to make history. The logical connection between human agency and history affects what we can know about history. The prophets of Israel, he writes, ‘could infallibly foresee’ the ‘complete dissolution that awaited their state’ because they themselves, through their actions, were the ‘authors of this fate’. Echoing Spinoza, Kant credits the internally contradictory theocratic constitution of ancient Judah—in which the prophets acquiesced—with the eventual decline of the state.⁵¹ The prophets reliably predicted the future because they understood the political logic of the present. Similarly, human beings who know the moral law, and who know that it can be fulfilled (‘ought implies can’), must believe that it will be fulfilled through their own individual and collective action in history. If the knowledge of duty can never be lost (great moral-benchmark-setting achievements such as the French Revolution will always be remembered), the course of history must always lurch forward. There is no predetermination here, only the ongoing work of human beings trying to fulfil the law as individuals and in experiments of public justice.

This may suffice to ground the moral progress of individuals, but does it ensure the moral progress of humanity as such? Kant’s illustrious contemporary Moses Mendelssohn rejected this conclusion. Mendelssohn believed that individuals are capable of moral progress but that humanity as a whole ‘continually fluctuates within fixed limits, while maintaining, on the whole, about the same degree of morality in all periods—the same amount of religion and irreligion, of virtue and vice, of felicity and misery . . .’⁵² Although Kant explicitly and vigorously disagreed with Mendelssohn, his retorts are telling. On the one hand, he is forced to concede that history *may* warrant Mendelssohn’s pessimistic view, but so long as consciousness of duty remains pessimism cannot be the last word. Kant, that is, narrows history to the possibility of ameliorating individual moral agency (‘and however uncertain I may be and may remain as to whether we can hope for anything better for mankind, this uncertainty cannot detract from the maxim I have adopted or from the necessity of assuming for practical purposes that human progress is possible’⁵³). But, this

⁵¹ Kant, ‘An old question raised again: is the human race constantly progressing?’ Beck, *Kant: On History*, 138.

⁵² Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, trans. Allan Arkush (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 1983), 97.

⁵³ Reiss, *Kant: Political Writings*, 91. Cf. n. 51.

concedes Mendelssohn's point: individuals can improve; humanity cannot. On the other hand, Kant permits himself an overt confession of faith:

Thus it is not inappropriate to say of man's moral hopes and desires that, since he is powerless to fulfil them himself, he may look to *providence* to create the circumstances in which they can be fulfilled. The end of *man* as an entire species, i.e. that of fulfilling his ultimate appointed purpose by freely exercising his own powers, will be brought by providence to a successful issue, even although the ends of men as individuals run in a diametrically opposed direction. . . . I therefore cannot and will not see [human nature] as so deeply immersed in moral evil that practical moral reason will not triumph in the end, after many unsuccessful attempts, thereby showing that it is worthy of admiration after all.⁵⁴

In the end, Kant seems to repose faith in a God who is more than a postulate of pure practical reason and in a Providence that is more than an immanent current of progress within a purely human history. Perhaps this is a part of the faith for which Kant wanted to make room by delimiting the boundaries of knowledge. At any rate, the entire Kantian engagement with hope shows how tenuous the attempt to displace religious hope with secular hope can be. A shallow thinker, such as Condorcet, can get away with the substitution. A deep thinker, such as Kant, cannot, despite his best intentions.

With the arrival of a far more robust and self-confident secularism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the attempt is made to tear hope from its religious roots altogether. Against the background of Hegel, whose progressive philosophy of history drew everything in heaven and on earth into a process leading to a secularized messianism, Marxism asserted its own version of worldly Utopia. To Marxism's most eloquent theorist on hope, Ernst Bloch, we now turn.

Bloch

Ernst Bloch, a heterodox, humanistic Marxist, wrote the longest, sustained treatment of hope in Western philosophical literature. *The Principle of Hope*, an English translation of his three-volume, *Das*

⁵⁴ Ibid. 92.

Prinzip Hoffnung (1954–9), runs to over 1,400 pages.⁵⁵ The work is hard to characterize. It is part conceptual analysis, part encyclopedia of the ‘wish images’ and utopian aspirations of ancient, medieval, and modern cultures, religions, and literatures—part socialist propagandizing, and part German metaphysics of the most inflationary sort. It is a vast and erudite work, the product of a fertile, critical, and visionary mind. Its style is by turns gnomic, oracular, and ecstatic. It is philosophy in the same sense and with the same ambition as Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Mind* is philosophy. It is unlikely to persuade philosophers of an Anglo-American intellectual temperament but it is no less intriguing for that. Its assets are alas offset by deficits. It is ponderous, jargon-laden, often opaque, meandering in its structure, and offensive in its tone. Its author was an apologist for Stalin in somewhat the same way as Heidegger, one of Bloch’s nemeses, was an acolyte of Hitler’s.⁵⁶ (Bloch, however, never joined the Communist Party.) Although Bloch draws extensively from the entire Western philosophical, religious, and literary tradition, he is convinced that Marx has put philosophy on a new footing and that all further thought must stand on Marxian ground.

Philosophy will have conscience of tomorrow, commitment to the future, knowledge of hope, or it will have no more knowledge. And the new philosophy, as it was initiated by Marx, is the same thing as the philosophy of the New, this entity which expects, destroys or fulfils us all . . . Marxist philosophy, as that which at last adequately addresses what is becoming and what is approaching, also knows the whole of the past in creative breadth, because it knows no past other than the still living, not yet discharged past. Marxist philosophy is that of the future, therefore also of the future in the past; thus . . . it is living theory–practice . . . in league with the Novum.⁵⁷

Philosophizing must be seen henceforth as a revolutionary activity, a kind of liberating praxis. Philosophy must change the world, must brighten the way towards a utopian future. A proper philosophy of hope will equip the proletariat to achieve, penultimately, a socialist Utopia, after which an ultimate Utopia of complete spiritual fulfilment

⁵⁵ Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995) (paginated consecutively). For an authoritative commentary and critique, see Thomas H. West, *Ultimate Hope without God: The Atheistic Eschatology of Ernst Bloch* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991).

⁵⁶ West, *Ultimate Hope without God*, 66–7.

⁵⁷ Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 7–9 (italics in original).

can yet be achieved. Philosophy must aspire to explicate and strengthen the 'utopian function' of consciousness. Philosophy must comprise a *docta spes*: a comprehended hope. Soaring pronouncements such as these cannot fail to intrigue. None the less, Bloch's constant reliance on class analysis and dialectical materialism, his sniping condemnations of the bourgeoisie, and his stereotyped characterizations of virtuous proletarians versus craven capitalists grate on the nerves and threaten to make the book irrelevant to an age where Communism is a beacon of light to no one. These are grave flaws.

None the less, there is an ambition and spirit in the work that gives it a peculiar and perhaps perennial appeal. Bloch wrote, as a German-Jewish refugee, in dark times. The work was mostly composed between 1938 and 1947 in the United States, where Bloch was fortunate enough to have found asylum. To write of hope, on such a massive scale, during such an era speaks to the indomitable independence of Bloch's character. After the war, he returned to Germany, that is, to the German Democratic Republic to help build a new socialist state. He sought, true to his own teaching, to put hope into action. His humanistic, Marxist heterodoxy soon put him out of favour with the authorities, however, and he once again sought refuge in the west, finishing his days as a professor at the University of Tübingen and a mentor to the student rebels of the Sixties.⁵⁸ Although welcomed by both the United States and West Germany, Bloch loathed them both. He propagandized on behalf of the USSR, excused the atrocities of Stalin, and continued to support repressive states, such as the GDR, as closer to his utopian ideals than the human rights respecting capitalist societies in which he lived. Whether that too speaks to his independence or to an ideology-induced perversity, I leave to the reader to decide.

Bloch's basic project is to oppose the nihilism of the twentieth century by repristinating Marxism. He wants to give a philosophical

⁵⁸ For biographical information about Bloch, see the translators' introduction to *The Principle of Hope* (pp. xix–xxxiii) and West, *Ultimate Hope without God*, ch. 1. See also Richard H. Roberts, 'An Introductory Reading of Ernst Bloch's *The Principle of Hope*', *Journal of Literature & Theology*, 1 (1987), 89–94. Bloch's relationship with the Communist Party in the US (his wife joined, he did not) and with Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (the Socialist Unity Party of Germany) in the German Democratic Republic (again, his wife joined; he never did) is complicated. Bloch's independent streak cannot be gainsaid. All the more striking then is his whitewashing of Stalin's crimes.

grounding to humanistic or, as he terms it, 'warm stream' Marxism.⁵⁹ His is a Marxism concerned, as was the young Marx, with overcoming alienation; with achieving individual human fulfilment at the highest level within a just, egalitarian society based on sharing rather than exploitation and inequality. It is a spiritual vision, not without a strangely mystical doctrine at its heart, buttressed by an elaborate metaphysics. It at no point loses touch with history, the means of production, in short with the 'objective' concerns of Marxism but the vision is much deeper and more overtly metaphysical than that of standard Marxism. (For this reason, Bloch was accused of being overly subjective and forced to resign his teaching post in the GDR.)

Bloch does not, unlike 'cold stream' Marxism, believe in objective laws of history and foreordained outcomes, such as the inevitable demise of capitalist societies. Such faith in historical necessity Bloch calls a 'new opium for the people', inducing the same sort of passivity as that once engendered by blind obedience to divine decrees.⁶⁰ He sees history as a 'category of danger' where there are no guarantees. If amelioration of the human condition is to come, it will come as a result of human effort, fuelled by what he calls 'militant optimism'.⁶¹ There can be no immanent dynamic of progress, as in Condorcet or Kant, for Bloch. Human creativity, the leading edge of nature, occupies the place where divine creation and providential direction used to be.

God is dead, but nature is not. There is an evolutionary dynamic to the universe. Influenced by the vitalism of Nietzsche and Bergson, although sharply critical of the latter as a bourgeois thinker, Bloch views nature as a process of creative becoming. (He tries, thereby, to hold both to the Marxist commitment to materialism and to an inspired, lively universe that can support, ontologically, his anthropology of hope.) The substrate of nature, following Aristotle, is possibility per se.⁶² Matter, the raw stuff of the universe, is a 'real-possible'. Its actualization is not a foreordained unfolding of what was already given

⁵⁹ Bloch wished to resurrect the young visionary, humanistic Marx. He referred to this as 'warm stream Marxism'. See Bloch, *Principle of Hope*, 209; West, *Ultimate Hope without God*, 35.

⁶⁰ Bloch, *Principle of Hope*, 199.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² 'And in the unexhausted whole of the world itself: matter is the real possibility for all the forms which are latent in its womb and are delivered of it through process. In this most comprehensive concept of real possibility, the *dynamei on* (Being-in-Possibility) is located, which Aristotle himself defined as matter.' *Ibid.* 235.

in potentia, but a process open to radical novelty, to the *Novum*, to real discontinuity to what has been before.

What is prefigured in [nature] drives on to unfold itself, but not of course as if it already existed beforehand, boxed into the narrowest space. The 'seed' itself still awaits many leaps, the 'inherent propensity' unfolds itself to ever new and more precise beginnings of its potentia-possibilitas. The real Possible in seed and inherent propensity is consequently never an encapsulated finished entity which, first existing in miniature, simply has to grow out.⁶³

It is crucial to Bloch to affirm radical novelty. Whereas previous utopian philosophies as well as the Jewish and Christian religions have all envisioned an *Ultimum*, a final ideal state, their versions of the *Ultimum* have all been based on a repetition of an original perfection, a *Primum*, rather than on something completely new, a *Novum*.⁶⁴ These previous utopias were largely products of contemplation and imagination—meditations on what already exists and wishful projections from the given to the desired. They largely excluded active work on behalf of Utopia, the kind of revolutionary theory-praxis that Marxism makes criterial to authentic knowledge. Only the concept of the radically new secures human freedom and the deployment of that freedom in action on behalf of realizing Utopia. Furthermore, it is the possibility of genuine novelty that becomes a criterion for authentic hope as opposed to debased and spurious wishfulness. The latter merely intends to acquire and secure more of what already exists, of what already is present—it is the archetypal hope of the bourgeois and others who mean merely to replicate existing social, economic, and political relations in ways advantageous to them. It leads to false wish-images of the *Ultimum*. *Genuine hope, however, will intend something radically new and never before seen—a working, practical socialist utopia after which the fulfillment of all the possibilities of humanity will be possible.* (Exactly how Bloch reconciles the need for the radically new with the contents that constitute it but are not new, such as justice, equality, freedom, and so on, is unclear. It may be that their conjunction in a Utopia is radically new. None the less, to project a Blochian Utopia at all, we must already be in possession of those moral concepts that give it content. The notion of the radically new seems to me incoherent.)

⁶³ Ibid. 238.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 198–205.

How does Bloch get from this ontological thesis about the inner possibility and vitality of nature to human hope as such? In line with German Romantic and neo-Romantic philosophers of nature, Bloch holds that nature reaches its highest expression in human consciousness and action. Nature is oriented towards becoming, towards the new, towards the 'not yet'. The 'anticipatory consciousness' of human beings is the forward edge of nature. Human history at its (revolutionary) best is a 'front' between what has been given and what militant optimism intends to create. The deepest tendencies of human consciousness and action, organized at the highest level in terms of human history, are expressive of the implicit tendencies in nature. Nature is a platform for human making; humanity, acting under the guidance of its utopian aspirations, is *natura naturans* itself. (All of this is more asserted than argued.)

Human beings are characterized by basic drives, such as sexuality and self-preservation. The most basic drive, however, is hunger—the yearning to be filled. Yearning is forward-looking. Human beings are unfinished creatures; 'empty and hence greedy, striving and hence restless'.⁶⁵ Their orientation is most fundamentally towards the future. Much of Western philosophy has got this wrong. Plato, for example, supposed being to be static, perfect, and complete. Knowledge was anamnesis, rather than anticipation; praxis looked back to a template fixed by a static nature, rather than forward into Utopia. Drawing on the approach of the sociology of knowledge, Bloch sees the reification of being as reflective of the congealed power and class structure of an oppressive society. Similarly, the then current vogue of psychoanalysis, which interpreted present psychological dysfunction against a presumptive background of childhood trauma, repressed drives, memories, and so on was fixated on the past. But Bloch believed that the present is better grasped in light of the future, of the 'not yet given', than by the past. Drawing on Goethe, Bloch assumed that human life and the underlying forces of nature to which it gives expression are a project of heroic self-making, of becoming rather than being. The future, anticipated but not yet known, is our only homeland

⁶⁵ 'And in the unexhausted whole of the world itself: matter is the real possibility for all the forms which are latent in its womb and are delivered of it through process. In this most comprehensive concept of real possibility, the *dynamei on* (Being-in-Possibility) is located, which Aristotle himself defined as matter.' Bloch, *Principle of Hope*, 45.

(*Heimat*).⁶⁶ Like Faust, Blochian man could never say to any moment, short of the final utopian fulfilment, 'Verweile doch, du bist so schön!' (Stay awhile, you are so sweet!) The future is always drawing us on.

Basic drives do not exist as ahistorical endowments of some putatively fixed 'human nature'. Rather, they are shaped by the historical context and horizon in which human beings live. Our drives are shaped by the wish-images and utopian visions of human fulfilment generated by our cultures. These latter reflect, in a Marxist manner, economic and hence political relations on the ground. Drives, furthermore, are subject to another more subjective kind of reflexivity and articulation. When human beings become self-aware of their drives, when they feel them (that is, become conscious of their experience of their drives), they are termed emotions. Now, in so far as consciousness is typically anticipatory—thinking, as Bloch says, means 'venturing beyond'⁶⁷—mental acts intend objects. Emotions, therefore, are states of the self that involve intentions directed towards objects, either tangible or notional. All emotions 'venture beyond', but some do so more than others. In a dichotomy somewhat reminiscent of Aquinas's concupiscible and irascible passions, Bloch designates two categories of emotion: filled and expectant emotions. Filled emotions include such states as envy, greed, or admiration. Filled emotions are short-term affairs; the objects they intend lie ready at hand. Expectant emotions involve objects that are not readily available. They imply a real future, the future of the 'not yet'.

Thus the *expectant emotions* are distinguished . . . from the filled emotions by the *incomparably greater anticipatory character* in their intention, their substance, and their object. All emotions refer to the horizon of time, because they are highly intentioned emotions, but the expectant emotions open out entirely into this horizon. All emotions refer to the actually temporal aspect in time, i.e. to the mode of the future, but whereas the filled emotions only have an unreal future, i.e. one in which objectively nothing new happens, the expectant emotions essentially imply a real future; in fact that of the Not-Yet, of what has objectively not yet been there. When they are banal, fear and hope also intend unreal future, but secretly or deep down even then a more total fulfilment has entered the banal fulfilment, one which, quite unlike the case of the filled emotions, lies beyond the available given world.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ So the very last sentence of the book: 'Once he has grasped himself and established what is his, without expropriation and alienation, in real democracy, there arises in the world something which shines into the childhood of all and in which no one has yet been: homeland.' *Ibid.* 1375–6.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 4. ⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 74–5.

In so far as Bloch gives—illogically, it seems to me—a substantive and normative character to the category of the ‘not yet’, the expectant emotions are a sign within us of a future reality drawing us onward. Bloch’s ‘not yet’ functions somewhat like Aristotle’s unmoved mover, attracting the whole universe towards itself. Anticipatory consciousness and the expectant emotions that underlie it do not give us distinct knowledge. But they do give us an intuition or apprehension of future reality, the reality (if it is a reality) of the ‘not yet’ (*Noch-Nicht*).

How does Bloch constitute the category of that which does not yet exist as if it were an attractive force; how can a nothing act as a something? The ‘not yet conscious’ is known, or at least intuited, by hope. Hope discloses the ‘reality’ of the not yet. Hope is the most important of the expectant emotions. It is ‘the most human of all mental feelings . . . it also refers to the furthest and brightest horizon. It suits that appetite in the mind which the subject not only has, but of which, as unfulfilled subject, it still essentially consists’.⁶⁹ The subject, as a yearning creature, is drawn towards the future; it discovers futurity as its own essence. The present cannot suffice. In fact, the present is dark. The human subject per se, in the lived immediacy of the moment, experiences nothing but darkness. Our first-person experience, contra Descartes, is not at all self-certifying or self-illuminating. We experience ourselves as if in a cloud of unknowing.

Not the most distant therefore, but *the nearest is still completely dark*, and precisely because it is the nearest and most immanent; *the knot of the riddle of existence is to be found in this nearest*. The life of the Now, the most genuinely intensive life, is not yet brought before itself, brought to itself as seen, as opened up.⁷⁰

Our being, as lived in the here and now, is an impenetrable mystery to itself. Only in the light of the not yet is the darkness of the now redeemed, the cloud of unknowing dispersed. The future lends the present its sense. Our consciousness lives by the light of the ‘not yet conscious’. As Bloch puts it in his rather mystical manner: ‘Thus the Not-Yet-Conscious in man belongs completely to the Not-Yet-Become,

⁶⁹ Bloch, *Principle of Hope*, 75.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 292–3.

Not-Yet-Brought-Out, Manifested-Yet-Become, more specifically with what is approaching in history and in the world.⁷¹

It is difficult to see, logically, how the not-yet-conscious or not-yet-become can function like a force or entity that has become, that *is*. If Bloch wanted to treat his category in a purely conceptual way, as a Kantian boundary concept that exercises a regulative force in a notional manner, the problem would disappear. But that seems far from his intention. He thought of his ‘discovery’ of the not yet conscious (*Noch-Nicht-Bewusste*) as a decisive, orienting one; the ground for a new, revolutionary metaphysics.

In creative work an impressive boundary is overstepped which I designate as the point of transition to the not-yet-conscious. Effort, darkness, cracking ice, tranquility of the sea, and happy journey converge at this point. At this point, if the breakthrough is successful, that land looms up where no one has ever been, that land indeed which itself has never been, that land which requires human being as the wanderer, the compass, the depth in the land.⁷²

These do not sound like the words of someone proposing a thought experiment or heuristic model. They sound like the words of a prophet or an oracle who has glimpsed a truth too recondite for vulgar minds.

What Bloch has given us is a mystically tinged theism without a *theos*. He broke with the Enlightenment tradition of valorizing progress as a secularized version of Providence but he reimports Providence in the form of a dynamic, creative, evolving nature that lends ontological support to human yearning and striving. He constituted hope as a kind of *sensus numinus* that discloses the deep processes of emergent reality, not merely the errant emotional states of individual subjectivities. Thus, he introduces mystical knowledge of a kind into the heart of his thought—heterodox indeed for a Marxist. Most significantly, he deifies the future—the mysteriously real yet strictly speaking unreal, ‘not yet conscious’—investing it with powers worthy of the God of the Bible. It orients us, consoles us, saves us from fear and despair in the present and redeems us fully in its own future time. If Marx represents a massive secularization of messianic belief, Bloch

⁷¹ Ibid. 13.

⁷² Bloch, cited West, *Ultimate Hope without God*, 7.

represents its kabbalah, a mystical theosophy, and soteriological praxis, which infinitely deepens the original dispensation.

But what warrants believing any of this? All of Bloch's substantive metaphysical positions are open to challenge. His confidence in Marxist solutions to human problems high and low has been undermined by history itself, the court to which Marxism by its own principles appealed. The mystical investment that Bloch made in hope retains its resonance only because of the theistic background that he overtly rejects. Were it not for the continuing power of the biblical inheritance, in which hope discloses to us an ultimate Goodness at the heart of reality, hope would sink to the level of mere emotion. It is difficult to see how Bloch can constitute hope as a *sensus numinus* without the supporting platform of the God of Israel, whether sensed in the depth of the present moment as Presence or intuited as Redeemer in the future. It is God, not simply some mysterious 'not yet conscious' who properly draws us on. One need not, of course, believe assertions of this kind, but those who find such assertions incredible ought to concede that such beliefs translated into a Blochian ersatz are no more credible.⁷³

Arendt

Hannah Arendt's thought marks an end to any notion of history as progress.⁷⁴ She departs both from the liberal tradition in political thought, exemplified here by Kant, and from socialism or Marxism, exemplified by Bloch. Arendt writes in 'dark times'; hers is a world in which genuine politics and authentic humanity have been overwhelmed by totalitarianism and degraded and abused by the West. Far from a narrative of progress, history seems a narrative of decline

⁷³ A sympathetic Christian appropriation of Bloch which minimizes the problems to which I have pointed while disclosing others may be found in Jürgen Moltmann, *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics*, trans. M. Douglas Meeks (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1984), 173–87. Moltmann, whose own theology has been influenced by Bloch, identifies with his critique of traditional Christianity and reads him capaciously such that he becomes a kind of theist himself, albeit not yet a Christian.

⁷⁴ Indeed, Arendt sees 'strong teleological visions of historic inevitability (known to us as "Progress")' as contributory to the violence of modern times and the degradation of politics. See Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Meditations on Modern Political Thought* (University Park, Penn.: Penn State University Press, 1992), 108, 111.

from pristine experiences of humanizing political action in Periclean Athens and of stable traditional authority in Rome. The humane experiences of freedom, authoritative public culture, the joy of political participation and the common sense of a shared human world are strangers to modernity. Arendt draws inspiration from the ancients, as well as from experiences of heroic political founding, as in the American Revolution. The gaze is drawn backwards. Notions of progress or yearning for Utopia are signs of the grave malaise of alienation from the real world.

What redeems, fulfils, and heightens the experience of human life for Arendt is political action—the life of the citizen. But the idea that action contributes in any way to an immanent historical process, leading as if by providence to a redemptive end is firmly rejected. Arendt, in her major work, *The Human Condition*, casts doubt on politics as an end or goal directed activity altogether. She sees politics qua making as fundamentally misguided. Action is in a sense its own end. Although action is evanescent and fragile, it none the less, in Arendt's peculiar, classically inspired conception, endows human life with a dignity and potential for imperishability that is the chief locus of hope. In answer to Kant's question of what we may hope for, Arendt might answer, like an ancient Athenian, that our deeds and words should be remembered by our peers and endure forever. Politics, in the sense of the free action of free men and women, is founded on such a hope. Not, however, in the sense of hope for making a better world but in the sense of achieving a kind of immortality for oneself and one's political community. That is what one may hope for.⁷⁵

This seemingly anachronistic retrieval of ancient Greek ideas of immortality as glorious action derives from Arendt's modernist stress on self-realization, on authenticity. Somewhat in the manner of her teacher, Martin Heidegger, Arendt privileges the full realization of individuality as against the homogenizing dynamic of the mass. Every human being comes into the world with the promise of the new; everyone is unique. Unlike Heidegger, 'natality', the miracle of unique humanity given at birth, rather than mortality, the consciousness of

⁷⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 19. An excellent and comprehensive guide to Hannah Arendt's thought is found in Michael Gottsegen, *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994). See 30–6 for a discussion of the hope for immortality in ancient Greece and in Arendt's view.

death that hovers over the experience of being, grounds the human condition for Arendt.⁷⁶ Politics—speech and action among other free men and women—is the only realm where the promise of natality can be realized. Human uniqueness, which when articulated in the social context results in an irreducible plurality of perspectives, is a root feature of our common world. Although modern mass societies, especially in their totalitarian variants, try to destroy individuality and coercively assimilate it to conformity, individuality is a high achievement. Individuality, however, does not imply a retreat into a presumptive self. The self grows only in the speech and action, the interaction *inter homines*, afforded by the polis. The project of self-realization requires, and contributes to, political society.

The loss of self, or more precisely, the abandonment of the project of authentic self-creation, is coordinate with the loss of a public sphere, a shared world. Arendt calls this condition, which is the seedbed of modern totalitarianism and of the lesser but still grave maladies of Western societies, worldlessness or world-alienation.⁷⁷ These terms do not refer to the insanity of the schizophrenic, who has lost touch with a consensual reality. They refer rather to the condition of the *idiotes*, the apolitical condition of the privatized, atomized man. Arendt, if she can be typed at all, comes close to civic republicanism. It is in the public sphere of political action and speech that we experience freedom, as opposed to the private sphere, where we experience only the necessitarian dimensions of life, i.e., the life of the household tied to the project of mere survival. In Arendt's view, humans experience a dialectical growth in their humanity as they rise from labour, securing the necessities of life, to work, making useful and beautiful things that endure, to action, initiating processes in history and nature.

It seems odd to say that politics is not about securing valued ends such as freedom, equality, good legislation, and so on but is, as it were, an end in itself. For Arendt, the above-mentioned goods are foundational to politics—they must exist in advance in order for politics to

⁷⁶ On natality, see Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 9, 247; ead., *Between Past and Future* (New York: Viking Press, 1968), 61, 167–71; ead., *On Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 212.

⁷⁷ *Between Past and Future*, 54. Arendt traces the loss of confidence in the truth-revealing work of the senses and the mind to the rise of modern science. She refers to Descartes' global doubt as the signature of modern worldlessness.

take place—but they are not the point of politics.⁷⁸ Such goods are products of human work; they reflect the human in the mode of *homo faber*. But work is different from action. These goods are not properly political. Politics, in the most exalted sense, is about action not about labour or work. The life of action does not make objects of any sort; it manifests freedom. Action discloses the highest mode of being. This, according to Arendt, was the central insight of the ancient Greek experience of the polis. In political action, human beings achieved the highest realization of their unique individual and shared humanity. It was in action that each person made good on the implicit promise of his or her natality. The *vita activa*, not the *vita contemplativa*, was the forum for self-realization. The Greek philosophers, led by Plato, rejected this central insight and, by substituting contemplation for action as the highest mode of being, degraded action into making, into goal-directed behaviour.⁷⁹ Plato and Aristotle's constant analogizing of the political art to other *techne*, such as shipbuilding or flute playing, indicates the degradation and misconstrual of action. But why should action be so freighted with meaning? Why should action serve as the locus for the highest human hope, the hope for self-realization?

The significance of action derives from its relationship with two other concepts: uniqueness and plurality. By uniqueness, Arendt refers to the distinctiveness of the human vis-à-vis other forms of life. Human beings are not only distinct from other animals; they are distinct from one another. Individuality is central to human uniqueness. Furthermore, as unique human individuals associate with one another and form societies, their societies display the uniqueness of their constituent members. A group of human beings is not like a group of ants. The significance of action is that it expresses uniqueness and plurality. Arendt writes:

Speech and action reveal [man's] unique distinctness. Through them, men distinguish themselves instead of being merely distinct; they are the modes in which human beings appear to each other, not indeed as physical objects, but *qua* men. This appearance, as distinguished from mere bodily existence, rests

⁷⁸ 'Whenever we hear of grandiose aims in politics, such as establishing a new society in which justice will be guaranteed forever, or fighting a war to end all wars or to make the whole world safe for democracy, we are moving in the realm of this kind of thinking.' That is, of thinking that politics is about making something rather than manifesting ones being in freedom (ibid. 79).

⁷⁹ Ibid. 46–7; *The Human Condition*, 14.

on initiative, but it is an initiative from which no human being can refrain and still be human. This is true of no other activity in the *vita activa*. Men can very well live without laboring, they can force others to labor for them, and they can very well decide merely to use and enjoy the world of things without themselves adding a single useful object to it; the life of an exploiter or slaveholder and the life of a parasite may be unjust, but they certainly are human. A life without speech and without action, on the other hand . . . is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men.⁸⁰

‘Word and deed’ insert us into a uniquely human world. True, we are born as unique beings into the world (the fact of natality) but action, which is like a ‘second birth’, ratifies and extends our newness. In natality, we were given a beginning. In action, we begin. We make new beginnings in nature and in history, whose consequences we cannot foresee and whose end we cannot know. The fact of our natality—that unique beings such as you or me should have entered the universe—has a touch of the miraculous about it. (‘The new always happens against the overwhelming odds of statistical laws and their probability, which for all practical, everyday purposes amounts to a certainty; the new therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle.’⁸¹) Similarly, action has a miraculous quality. To initiate something new reveals what is unique about the person who enters the public realm and begins to act. Action is revelatory; it presents an answer to the question implicitly posed by one’s fellows in the public realm, ‘Who are you?’

In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world, while their physical identities appear without any activity of their own in the unique shape of the body and sound of the voice. This disclosure of ‘who’ in contradistinction to ‘what’ somebody is—his qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings, which he may display or hide—is implicit in everything somebody says or does.⁸²

It may appear from the above that the significance of action is that it enables a kind of apotheosis of personal being. But that is too private and subjective (or too mystical) a way of construing Arendt’s meaning. Recall that action occurs in a public realm, a ‘space of appearance’.

⁸⁰ *The Human Condition*, 176.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 178.

⁸² *Ibid.* 179.

The space of appearance is not a physical space—an agora or forum—but a delicate web of human interrelations, a community. Action initiates and sustains the relationships that establish community. What characterizes community is power. Unlike strength (a personal attribute) or force (a material factor), power describes the potential of individuals in groups to act in the presence of one another. Power is experienced when people live together. It is ‘actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds are not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate or destroy but to establish relations and create new realities’.⁸³ Arendt thus introduces an axiological dimension to the revelatory experience that constitutes action. Action is not simply disclosing oneself or initiating processes; it is respecting the ‘space of appearance’ and the persons who appear within it. A whole ethic is implied here. The public realm, in all of its miraculous fragility, rests on the commitment of those who appear within it not to violate it or one another.

Arendt does not flesh out as much as one would like the implicit ethic of the public realm. Her concept of appearance remains rather more numinous than moral, charged as it is with a salvific potential. It is not clear what content action has or is permitted, as a non-purposive activity, to have. (This remains problematic in *The Human Condition* and is addressed in her later works.) None the less, a more robustly normative dimension enters with the concept of forgiveness. It is a constitutive feature of action that its consequences are boundless (once initiated, processes do not come to an abrupt end but meander on through history and time, without limit), unpredictable, fleeting, and irreversible. What prevents us from being defeated by the unforeseeable consequences of our actions is the human ability to forgive.

Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain victims of its consequences forever, not unlike the sorcerer’s apprentice who lacked the magic formula to break the spell.⁸⁴

Forgiveness facilitates for Arendt the maintenance of relationships within the community, the restoration of trust between persons, which the

⁸³ Ibid. 200.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 237.

unforeseen and harmful consequences of action disrupted. Forgiveness (a creature, like action, of words and deeds) inheres in the dialogue and common life of the public realm. Or else the public realm perishes in, as we say, a cycle of violence. Vengeance partakes of the necessity of nature. Forgiveness is a form of action; it initiates something new and free. Arendt credits Jesus with the discovery of the role of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs.⁸⁵ (With a little more reflection, she might have recalled that forgiveness is a major factor in the Hebrew Bible's constitution of the 'realm of human affairs'. Mosaic law stipulates that we are not to bear a grudge against our neighbour (Lev. 19: 18) in order to preempt a cycle of vengeance. Forgiveness among human beings is fundamental to the atonement that reprimates individual and social life.⁸⁶)

Forgiveness enables us to go on together. So, too, does promise-keeping. Promises partially dispel the unpredictability which infects action. If genuine action, genuine politics, have to do with free and equal persons in relation to one another, promising is the only means they have of coordinating their lives. When one rules another, one can dispel unpredictability by command and coercion. But when equals relate to one another in the public realm, the best assurance they have for their common life are 'certain islands of predictability', 'isolated islands of certainty in an ocean of uncertainty'.⁸⁷ Such are promises, covenants, pacts, and contracts.

Rather like Kant, Arendt assumes the existence of moral norms and theorizes their significance without feeling the need to derive them from anything more fundamental. The existence of such norms as forgiveness and promise-keeping bespeaks the existence of a 'world'. It is the loss of this common world, where concepts such as forgiveness and promising are no longer matters of common sense, that needs to be scrutinized, not the common world itself. 'Worldlessness' is the malaise of modern times. The loss of the public realm, of genuine and powerful community, is the disease for which we must hope for a cure.

Arendt's project then is to commend the *vita activa* as a medium for creating genuine community in which human lives can be truly, fully

⁸⁵ *The Human Condition*, 238–43.

⁸⁶ For an eloquent analysis of the basal nature of forgiveness in Judaism, see Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*, trans. Simon Kaplan (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1995), 209.

⁸⁷ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 244.

lived. The perversions of privatization, of the ‘economization’ of life; of lives stultified by overemphasis on labour and work, on production and consumption, is what we must overcome. This is what we might hope for. Arendt does not in *The Human Condition* offer a content for a hopeful politics as much as a vision of action in an authentic public realm as a locus of hope. Action, like virtue, is an end in itself.

[The] specifically human achievement lies altogether outside the category of means and ends; [action] is no end because the means to achieve it—the virtues, or *aretai*—are not qualities which may or may not be actualized, but are themselves ‘actualities’. In other words, the means to achieve the end would already be the end... there is nothing higher to attain than this actuality itself.⁸⁸

To live, here and now, in however fleeting the moment, in the web of words and deeds among equals, is what we can hope for. To act in a world protected by the solemnity of promises kept and forgiveness granted is the highest object of aspiration. Such a world fulfils the promise of humanity implicit in our birth as unique beings.

The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, ‘natural’ ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born. Only the full experience of this capacity can bestow upon human affairs faith and hope, those two essential characteristics of human existence which Greek antiquity ignored altogether, discounting the keeping of faith as a very uncommon and not too important virtue and counting hope among the evils of illusion in Pandora’s box. It is this faith in and hope for the world that found perhaps its most glorious and most succinct expression in the few words with which the Gospels announced their ‘glad tidings’: ‘A child has been born unto us’.⁸⁹

There is an ironic self-defeating quality to Arendt’s thesis. Natality, the newness of birth, brings hope. Natality is ratified and extended by action, the ‘second birth’. And yet action cannot be goal directed. The newness that the birth of a unique person imports into the world awakens hope—but hope for what? Not, surely, for what this new person will accomplish or achieve in or for the world. For the highest mode of this new person’s being is self-revelatory action in the public realm, not, say, the amelioration of society through public policy, law,

⁸⁸ Ibid. 207.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 247.

politics in the ordinary sense or even through products of fabrication such as beautiful objects or useful technologies, nor even new scientific discoveries. Why then should birth bring hope? If our significance as agents is not that we can change or improve the world but only experience it in the deepest possible way, what does one more person, however unique, add other than another mode, to use Spinoza's language, of experience? Why should the new bring an experience of hope and faith, rather than Ecclesiastes' weary dismissal of the new as not-so-new after all?

The political theorist, Jean Bethke Elshtain, offers a reading of this passage that dispels, to an extent, our perplexity. Elshtain suggests that

Arendt's evocation of natal imagery through its most dramatic historic narrative is not offered as an abstraction to be abstractly endorsed. Rather, she invites us to restore long-atrophied dispositions of commemoration and awe: birth, she declares, is a 'miracle', a beginning that renews and irreversibly alters the world. Hers is a fragile yet haunting figuration that stirs recognition of our own vulnerable beginnings and our necessary dependency on others, on mother.⁹⁰

Arendt's use of 'miracle' is not mere rhetoric, in Elshtain's view. Her intention is to evoke awe and wonder in us; to lead us to acknowledge and respect our dependence on one another. It is also to guide us towards esteeming those practices, rituals, and institutions that commemorate or celebrate our deepest ties and relations. The miracle of natality, properly grasped, renews our spirit and our common world. It offers hope, which Elshtain, characterizing Arendt's view, calls 'the human capacity that sustains political being'.⁹¹

To an extent, this reading underscores the emphasis on the quality of experience (found in action) that we have noted before. Birth inspires awe and hope; awe and hope are states of heightened experience and awareness of our condition. This still does not address how hope can endure when we cannot accomplish anything that improves or changes our condition. The second element here, however, leads us out of the cul-de-sac. The idea of commemoration suggests a specific content for action: rehearsing traditional practices, such as religious rituals surrounding birth, in order to mark an event, in this case the fact of natality, as sacred. Indeed, action-contents of this sort emerge in

⁹⁰ Elshtain, *Meditations on Modern Political Thought*, 110.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

Arendt's later writings, which show a far greater concern for the content of action than was heretofore permissible. In *Between Past and Future*, *On Revolution*, and other works, Arendt is concerned for the stability and endurance of the public realm, the shared world. She attends then to matters of content, for those normative orientations, practices, and cultural transmissions that make for maintenance of the world and militate against world alienation. Here questions of authority, such as the authority of tradition, of the content of civic education, of religion, and of the normative contours of political action come into play. A fuller picture of action emerges. None the less, what can be hoped for remains, although enriched, essentially the same: a world in which humans can act so as to disclose who they are to one another and so achieve a realization of their being. Beyond this, they can hope for the nurturance of humanizing and pacific relations among themselves within their shared world. They can hope for a politics that enhances humanity and eschews violence. They can hope for a true understanding of power (as opposed to violence) as related to the joy of participation in the public realm on behalf of the common good. The accent throughout remains on the experiential, on the quality of what can be experienced rather than on the achievement of any putative results.

Unlike Bloch, Arendt does not underwrite an open-ended project of social engineering under the star of utopian aspiration. She is poles apart, on principle, from this piece of modern hubris. But, like Bloch, a quasi-mystical impulse seems to have coloured Arendt's understanding of hope. As I have suggested, to construe hope as a virtue validates it as an orientation towards both the present and the future. Arendt invests action as a way of manifesting freedom and revealing oneself in the present with a significance bordering on the redemptive. Hope here is hope as affirmation of the goodness or truth of being. What we can hope for is the possibility of an authentic life in common, not as a future Utopia, pace Bloch, but as the disclosure of genuine being in the here and now.

In these four thinkers we see that the distance from the secular to the sacred is not as great as it might first have appeared. Condorcet and Kant, despite their different critical postures towards religion (one fully condemnatory, the other reformative), could not succeed in disentangling progress from providence. The latter concept lurks in the background, giving sense to its secularized successor. Their optimistic

readings of the course of history could not appeal, in an uncontested way, to the historical evidence. They had to import teleology and eschatology, the religious roots of which they would prefer to ignore. None the less, without those roots and background assumptions, such as the belief in the goodness of a God who ultimately will save his creatures and their world, their belief in progress seems arbitrary and unsupported by the evidence. Bloch and Arendt, different though they are from one another, both sought salvation in transcendent experience. Both invest hope, in conjunction with political action, with sacredness. Hope is for both a *sensus numinus*; a vivid connection with the deepest potentialities of life and consequently a human excellence or virtue. Where hope is concerned, the sacred cannot be kept at bay, even by the secular.⁹²

The hope of a democratic age aims at self-sufficiency but does not quite achieve it. Let us look then at how overt religious hope fares. How have Jews and Christians adapted their traditional orientations in hope to the normative assumptions of the age?

⁹² See also the elegiac conclusion to Nisbet (*History of the Idea of Progress*, 352–7). Nisbet argues that faith in progress cannot be kept alive without a sense of the sacred. Ultimately, in his view, the future of the idea of progress is tied to the future of ‘Judeo-Christianity’ in the West. The decline of confidence in the idea of progress is traced by him to the decline of traditional religiosity.

6

Theologies of Hope

The secular philosophical approaches to hope, which we have just considered, endow various immanent elements with transcendent significance. For Condorcet, progress is as certain as Providence was for traditional Christians. For Bloch, the future itself, the 'not yet', fills the soul with yearning and draws the world forward towards its consummation. Both of these views founder on their own enthusiasm. Condorcet's view is rendered implausible by the savagery of subsequent history; Bloch's by its own conceptual incoherence. Kant and Arendt, both of whom are open to more overtly religious symbols of transcendence, are more moderate. Their understandings of hope, while robust, are also restrained. Arendt sees hope as implicated in the 'miraculous' birth of the child; in the entrance of human uniqueness into the world. Hope lies in the unfolding of uniqueness through action. This view honours the traditional conviction of individual worth anchored in the *imago dei*. Kant sees hope as reflective of the deepest impulses of sense-making that humans bring to nature and to history. Hope reflects the character of the mind, as it engages the sphere of conduct and the infinite task of making the city of man into the Kingdom of Ends. These views are more credible than those of Condorcet, Bloch, and their ilk but they are not yet credible enough. It is questionable how long the confidence and conviction of monotheism can endure in the absence of real monotheistic faith. The accumulated moral capital of that faith, without constant renewal, may not be enough to fund hope in a democratic age. Religious hope reconciles us to suffering that might otherwise seem hopeless; it bridges the vast chasm between expectation and disappointment by revealing even vaster vistas. It is questionable whether persons will continue to hope, commit their lives to moral purposes, and make significant

sacrifices without the confidence that faith and faith-funded hope provide.

Presumably, theologies offer a wider range of resources for hope than self-limiting secular philosophies. Let us now consider several representative Jewish and Christian theologies of hope. These theologies move within a climate governed by secular epistemic norms, on the one hand, and by democratic values, on the other. They are modern adaptations of tradition that aim to address the question of what Jews and Christians might reasonably expect from modern politics. To what extent should Jews and Christians identify with the broad aspirations of a democratic age? Do their traditions direct them to enthusiastic participation in, ambivalence towards, or determined rejection of the democratic project? Each of these attitudes will be exemplified in the theological portraits that follow.

The work of this chapter is more descriptive than normative. None the less, I want to advance a normative claim. That claim is that the Bible predisposes Jews and Christians towards the ambivalent or moderate stance. Consider a psalm recited daily by observant Jews, Psalm 146.

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul!
 I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing to my God as long as I exist.
 Put no trust in princes, in mortal man who can give no help.
 When his breath goes, he returns to the dust, and on that very day his designs perish.
 Happy is he who has the God of Jacob as his help, whose hope rests upon the Lord his God, Maker of Heaven and earth and sea and all that is therein;
 Who keeps faith forever, renders justice to the oppressed, and feeds those who are hungry.
 The Lord sets the captives free.
 The Lord opens the eyes of the blind, raises those who are bowed down, and loves the righteous.
 The Lord protects the strangers, and upholds the fatherless and the widow; but the way of the wicked he thwarts.
 The Lord shall reign forever; your God, O Zion, for all generations.
 Praise the Lord.¹

¹ This translation is taken from Philip Birnbaum (ed.), *Daily Prayer Book* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1949). The translation of *n'divim* (Ps. 146: 3) as 'princes' has been changed to 'the great' in the New Jewish Publication Society of America Version of the Jewish Bible (NJPS) but retained in Jewish prayer books. Christian translations such as the Revised Standard Version (RSV) continue to translate as 'princes'. Another version of the phrase is found in Ps 118: 8–9 and see also Jer. 17: 5.

The psalm reminds the worshipper that God alone is worthy of his hopes. 'Princes' are mortal and cannot fail to disappoint. Only God, the Creator, is faithful forever. God alone, not the institutions of human government, renders justice. God cares for the oppressed, the impoverished, and the marginal. God avenges them against those who abuse them. From such a perspective, human politics could well be disparaged. What do the designs of mortal men and women amount to compared with those of the Creator of heaven, earth, and sea?

Yet, this apparent disparagement cannot be the Bible's last word. It is not even its first word. For human beings, we recall, were put in the garden to 'till it and tend it' (Gen. 2: 15), to care for the creation. They were empowered as agents and where there is agency there are reasons to have hope in the outcome of deeds. When the Israelites were to reach their promised land, they were told to appoint political and judicial officials (Deut. 16: 18) who would 'govern the people with due justice'. Furthermore, the pursuit of justice ('Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may thrive and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you') is the only means to secure possession of the land in perpetuity (Deut. 16: 20; Isa. 1: 17). The people were also given the option—some commentators and legists believed that it was a commandment—to appoint a king, to import a foreign, gentile political system if that is what is needed to secure the necessities of worldly life, foremost among them political security. Both governing class and ordinary Israelite, and not only God, were charged to care for the widow and the orphan (Deut. 24: 17–22), the needy and the destitute (Deut. 24: 12). Indeed, a dominant motif in both Jewish and Christian ethics is *imitatio dei*—to 'follow His ways' (Ps. 128: 1). As the Talmud puts it:

As He clothed the naked (Gen. 3: 21), so do you clothe the naked; as He visited the sick (Gen. 18: 1), so do you visit the sick; as He comforted the mourners (Gen. 25: 11), so do you comfort the mourners; as He buried the dead (Deut. 34: 6), so do you bury the dead. (B. Sotah 14a)

Is it conceivable that Jews and Christians are asked to be God's agents, to walk in God's ways (Deut. 13: 4), but not to hope that their effort to do so will be met with some success, as if they were they condemned to the fate of Sisyphus? Does 'ought' not imply 'can'? Given the divine commandment to install institutions of government, is it impermissible to hope that governments too might succeed in pursuing justice and

walking in God's ways? The hope that human government could be redeemed for fit purposes animated the Israelite prophets in their centuries-long argument against their heads of state. They may have given up hope for specific kings but they did not despair of the possibilities of politics altogether, at least in a world believed to be under the ultimate governance of God.² The teaching of Psalm 146 then must be understood as cautionary. God is the ultimate guarantor of justice but must not be a proximate excuse for our neglect of it. God both calls for a fit human politics and reminds us not to expect that our politics, however effective and humane its achievement may be, can displace him as the focus of ultimate hope. *From a biblically oriented point of view, we are to have hope for politics, but within limits. Our aspirations for politics cannot be immoderate. Hope, with respect to the political, should be modest or muted rather than audacious.*³

Careful discernment of those limits has been a task of both Jewish and Christian theology.⁴ In this chapter, we consider how several

² Individual prophets took different attitudes towards the monarchy per se. First, Isaiah is fully committed to the Davidic monarchy. Hosea condemns the monarchy as a whole (e.g., Hos. 8: 4). Deutero-Isaiah transfers allegiance from the monarchy to the nation; he hopes for the political renewal of the people as such rather than for the Davidic line (e.g., Isa. 60: 21). None of these, however, despairs of the political dimension of Jewish life.

³ For the notion of 'muted hope' as characteristic of the expectations of the greatest of Jewish thinkers, see Ralph Lerner, *Maimonides' Empire of Light* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. xi.

⁴ Theologically, one might say that the attitude towards the efficacy of politics is a function of the larger question of what ought to be the proper attitude towards human endeavour as such, vis-à-vis human reliance on God's will. The Jewish tradition constantly worked towards balance between *bitaḥon* (faithful trust in God's providence) and *hishtdlut* (human initiative) without systematizing the dynamic relationship between them. The endless wrestling in medieval Jewish thought with the problem of human freedom in the face of presumptive divine foreknowledge is symptomatic of this struggle for balance. For a relevant set of scholarly studies, see C. H. Manekin and M. Kellner (eds.), *Freedom and Moral Responsibility: General and Jewish Perspectives* (College Park, Md.: University Press of Maryland, 1997). For relevant talmudic sources, see B. Berachot 35b, B. Sanhedrin 97b. The Christian tradition, with its intellectual-creedal orientation, engaged in robust theological dispute on this question from the time of the Church Fathers onward. The Christian *locus classicus* is Augustine's dispute with Pelagius. For the relevant texts, see Henry Bettenson (ed.), *Documents of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 52–9. With respect to politics and culture per se, the classic of Christian analysis of the problem is H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951). Niebuhr's typology, which refines the earlier work of Ernst Troeltsch, has five possible stances that Christians have taken vis-à-vis culture. The typology used in this chapter mirrors Niebuhr's main categories to an extent but is more abstract as it must incorporate both Jewish and Christian positions. Niebuhr's caution (*ibid.* 43–4) that all typologies are inexact and that figures, in their complexity, cannot be limited to one or another ideal type is apposite here.

Jewish and Christian theologians have tried to fix the proper limits of hope for political life. Among Jews, we will explore a trio of twentieth-century German thinkers—Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, and Martin Buber—who exemplify the range of possible positions, of ideal types. Cohen, a product of the nineteenth century deeply shaped by Kant's doctrine of progress, sees politics as a necessary and virtually sufficient framework for hope. Given Cohen's entirely demythologized, ethicized divinity, politics, properly conceived and executed, is in the last analysis the principal vehicle for redeeming the world. Rosenzweig, a student and critic of Cohen's, takes a diametrically opposed view. Rosenzweig teaches withdrawal from politics, at least for Jews, who are to retreat into themselves and nourish their own divinely guaranteed eternity. The world may be left to Christianity, whose task it is to pursue politics, but that is more curse than blessing. Politics has to do with fate and struggle; Judaism has to do with eternity and inwardness. The Jew should have no share in the political. Buber, a collaborator of Rosenzweig and prolific social thinker, charted a middle course. For Buber, politics is inherently corrupting, inherently unjust. But, life entails injustice and the godly way must be to commit no more injustice than is necessary. Politics is necessary and may, at least partially, be redeemed by prudent and moral action as the hour demands. Politics—shorn of both Cohen's utopian-eschatological hope and Rosenzweig's dismissive neglect—can be no more or no less hopeful than any other human project.

On the Christian side, we will look at three modern Protestant figures who express the same range of attitudes. For a thinker who has a robust, Cohen-like confidence in the possibilities of politics vis-à-vis the ultimate goal of eschatological fulfilment we turn to Walter Rauschenbusch. Rauschenbusch, although an American, studied in Germany and was influenced by the *fin de siècle* liberal Protestant social thought that also inspired Cohen. Rauschenbusch articulated the Social Gospel, a Christian version of American progressivism. His influence on subsequent mainline Protestantism was substantial. For a Rosenzweig-like distancing from politics and a centring of hope on an anti-politics of community, we will look at the contemporary American theologian Stanley Hauerwas. Affected by the pacifist tradition of Anabaptist Protestantism, Hauerwas, like Rosenzweig vis-à-vis the Jews, wants to situate the Church beyond nations and history, a self-absorbed community of the saved. As an analogue to Buber's cautious

but critical endorsement of politics we look at Jürgen Moltmann, a German theologian who drew from Ernst Bloch's future-oriented thought and fused this perspective with Christian eschatology. Moltmann's political theology focuses explicitly on the dynamics of hope in conjunction with political engagement, on the one hand, and on the expectation of the coming of God, on the other. The latter, divine initiative relativizes the former, human one. We have, therefore, three ideal types: robust investment of hope in politics, a veritable theological-political optimism; denial of hope in politics, a theological-political pessimism; and moderate, relative hope in politics, which we might call theological-political realism.

As the Christian theologians to be treated are all Protestants, we will close the chapter with a brief consideration of a canonical Catholic text—*Gaudium et Spes: The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* of the Second Vatican Council (1965).

Hermann Cohen: Messianism as Politics

It may seem counter-intuitive to portray Cohen as a thinker who invested robust hope in politics. At first glance, Cohen seems anti-political. Most Jews who have heard of him know him only as an anti-Zionist, a staunch German patriot who trusted in the profound inner affinity of Judaism with 'Germanness' (*Deutschtum*).⁵ Cohen rejected the dawning project of a national Jewish politics at the beginning of the twentieth century in favour of liberal acculturation within Germany. (That, of course, is also a politics.) The tragedy of Cohen's choice of acculturation is most poignantly grasped by reflecting on the fact that while Cohen died in 1918, several months before the defeat of his beloved Germany, his wife perished twenty-four years later in the Nazi concentration camp of Theresienstadt. For these reasons, Cohen is often dismissed by post-Holocaust Jews as an irrelevance. That, however, is deeply unfair and short-sighted. For Cohen's philosophy is of such a character that he invites, indeed demands, further and deeper reading.⁶ The cultural facts of his context and personal loyalties

⁵ For a partial translation of Cohen's *Deutschtum und Judentum*, see Eva Jospé (trans.), *Reason and Hope: Selections from the Jewish Writings of Hermann Cohen* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), 176–89.

⁶ For a good introduction to Cohen's thought, see Andrea Poma, 'Hermann Cohen: Judaism and Critical Idealism', in Michael L. Morgan and Peter Eli Gordon (eds.), *The*

cannot stand in judgement over his philosophical and theological work any more than can Kant's or Plato's.

None the less, the question returns in what sense does Cohen invest politics with an abundant hope? Cohen rejects political distinctiveness for Jews, in the form of both the ancient Jewish state and in the form of the Zionist hope for the restoration of a modern Jewish state.⁷ He does not, however, reject the political as such; indeed, he embraces it as the principal means for making the messianic promise of biblical monotheism actual in the world. Cohen is a philosophical theologian of monotheism who sees in the messianic idea the highest realization of the implicit promise of monotheism. Cohen adopts Kant's hopeful reading of the trajectory of human history, which we explored in the preceding chapter, and crowns it with the Jewish concept of the messianic age. *The one humanity, created by the One God, recovers its oneness in the fullness of the future through its hopeful and persistent practice of ethics in the present.* Ethics when directed to society as a whole has no option other than morally grounded socialist politics.⁸ For this thoroughly non-tragic and hopeful thinker, politics is the strategy of messianism.

Cambridge Companion to Modern Jewish Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 80–101 See also William Kluback, *The Legacy of Hermann Cohen* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1989). For contemporary Jewish philosophers whose work has been influenced to a considerable extent by Cohen, thus attesting to his ongoing (and salutary) influence, see Menachem Kellner (ed.), *The Pursuit of the Ideal: Jewish Writings of Steven Schwarzschild* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990) and Kenneth Seeskin, *Autonomy in Jewish Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁷ 'Hence the split into two [biblical] kingdoms may be regarded as a prelude to the world history of Judaism: David's realm is not the proper soil for the world of monotheism. Neither in this short and bygone past nor in any political present does Israel's historical calling lie. *The meaning and value of monotheism had to prove itself in this historical and political contradiction.* The future becomes the actuality of history. Therefore only a spiritual world can fulfill this national existence' (Cohen, *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*, trans. Simon Kaplan (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1995), 252). For Cohen's critique of Zionism (and Martin Buber's reply), see Jehuda Reinharz and Paul Mendes-Flohr (eds.), *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 571.

⁸ For a thorough study, see Steven S. Schwarzschild, 'The Democratic Socialism of Hermann Cohen', *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 27 (1956), 417–38. In Schwarzschild's words: 'The messianic belief is primarily the belief in the ethical norm of a united humanity created by the moral endeavors and history-shaping actions of men . . . Messianism is thus only the religious term for socialism' (427–8). For the original source, see Hermann Cohen, *Ethik des reinen Willens* (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1904), 528: 'ihrer Politik nicht anders ist, als was wir heutzutage Sozialismus nennen' (their (i.e., the Hebrew prophets) politics is nothing other than what we today call socialism.)

Cohen's work is shaped by the method of demythologization or idealization. Idealization denotes an incipient rationalism that already inheres within the deepest dynamics of Judaism. Judaism is a religion of reason at its heart. It is among the moral tasks of the Jew to further this development towards the rational, struggling against and overcoming those lingering traces of mythology that continue to infect religion. Interpretation must discern and identify the ideal, rational content of a religious symbol and free it from its mythic trappings. The rational content of a religious symbol must be set off against both the historical background in which it arose—this is the service that academic Jewish studies contributes to philosophy—and the imaginative or literary form, often redolent with myth, in which it is expressed.⁹ For Cohen, Israel's central philosophical insight is that God is unique. 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One!' (Deut. 6: 4) does not assert that there is one God as opposed to many gods, in a mere numerical sense.¹⁰ Rather, it asserts the uniqueness of God: God is wholly unlike everything in his creation. The uniqueness of God—the distinctiveness of God as against all existent things—serves to link the idea of God to the idea of ethics.¹¹ Just as 'ought' is set off categorically from every conceivable 'is', so too is the spirit of God set apart from the world engendered by him. One creature, however, the only being capable of reason, is 'correlated' with the spirit of God. That is, of course, the human being. The holy spirit of God is

⁹ The treatment of Cohen here follows my introduction to his 'The Significance of Judaism for the Religious Progress of Mankind', trans. Alan Mittleman, *Modern Judaism*, 24 (2004), 36–58. Cohen's method of idealization (*Idealisierung*) is derived from Kant, who differentiates idealized, 'pure religion' from historically embedded religion ('ecclesiastical religion'). See, e.g., Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), 105–9. In Kant's case, this differentiation comes at a horrific cost for Judaism as in the following famous quotation: 'Without dreaming of a conversion of all Jews (to Christianity in the sense of a messianic faith), we can consider it possible even in their case if, as is now happening, purified religious concepts awaken among them and throw off the garb of the ancient cult, which now serves no purpose and even suppresses any true religious attitude . . . The euthanasia of Judaism (*Euthanasie des Judenthums*) is pure moral religion (*reine moralische Religion*), freed from all the ancient statutory teachings, some of which were bound to be retained in Christianity (as a messianic faith)' (Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties* (*Der Streit der Fakultäten*), trans. Mary J. Gregor (Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 93–5). For Cohen, idealization strengthens Judaism by providing a rationally defensible faith compatible with a contemporary understanding of science and culture.

¹⁰ Cohen, *Religion of Reason*, 35.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 67.

correlated with a spirit, a will, towards holiness, towards ethics, in human beings. (Cohen's radical dichotomy between the unique God and all created beings prohibits him from relating God to humanity through spirit, as if an indwelling logos linked the two. That is too mythological a belief for the neo-Kantian Cohen. Hence, *correlation* rather than *relation* is his term of art for preserving the requisite distinction. The correlation between the human and the divine occurs at the level of ideas. God, no less than humanity, is an idea in the Kantian sense of a regulative concept that governs our quest for knowledge and right conduct.)

Men and women discover themselves as creatures capable of moral action towards one another; they discover that they are not merely juxtaposed to one another but that they can care for one another. In their discovery of their fellowship, they discover what they must do and become. They discover that the rational sphere of ethics must govern their fellowship. The presentation, by the Bible, of God's law as a revelation from above is a picturesque, mythopoeic (not yet idealized) way of conveying the essential autonomy and transcendental rationality of ethics. Ethics, as the expression of the world of the 'ought' is not grounded in any natural condition, in the world of the 'is'. The discovery of ethics is tantamount to the revelation of the unique God.

The concept of the one God correlates with the concept of one humanity. The factual pluralization of humanity into nations, however, requires that the idea of a unified humanity be kept alive and available in another form: the concept of the one people, Israel. Israel is not just another *Volk*; it is a people that has not come into being in a *natural* way but whose very existence is constituted by an *ethical* calling. That calling is to exemplify and effectuate for humanity the future messianic reappropriation of its normative conceptual oneness. Until the actual achievement in history, via ethical-political action, of the messianic age, the Jews are required to retain their exemplary oneness as a sign, symbol, and, tragically, a provocation to the nations. The Jews—one people in all the earth—are made to suffer, with sufferings of divine love, for the messianic cause, which flows from the deepest logic of monotheism.

Cohen reconfigures the question of theodicy from the metaphysical problem of *evil* to the human problem of *suffering*. Exemplary suffering

furthermore is to be found not in the natural fact of mortality but in the moral scandal of poverty.¹² In Cohen's view, the real suffering of humanity is sociological, not metaphysical. As such, it can be ameliorated. The entire prophetic enterprise, as he sees it, is directed towards the amelioration of society—towards making it a world worthy of God's creatures—through relief of suffering. The prophets equate the just man with the suffering, impoverished man. The knowledge of God, through which we recognize the one next to us (*Nebemensch*) as our fellow (*Mitmensch*) whom we are to love, issues into moral knowledge and moral commitment. Ethics is the praxis of social love. Israel, as the suffering people par excellence, is charged with putting the love of humanity into practice in the social-political domain.¹³

The prophets discover the idea or ideal of a unified humanity—hitherto unrecognized in human thought—made in the *imago dei*. This insight gives rise to the emotion, indeed, the Hebraic value, of compassion (*Mitleid*). Compassion goes a long way towards recognizing the poor, the widow, the orphan, the marginal one unlike ourselves as our *Mitmensch*. But compassion cannot go the whole way. To make compassion effective as an engine of social justice, one needs science. One needs, in Cohen's idiom, both Plato and the prophets. Cohen trusts that the modern sciences of sociology, politics, and economics, fuelled by prophetic compassion, can buttress a

¹² Cohen claims that it is 'characteristic of the Jewish consciousness that it does not fear death' (ibid. 461). Judaism, in its ever growing rationalism, has purged the afterlife of the myth-induced fear of punishment. There is no afterlife, in a mythological sense, for Cohen. The individual attains true individuality only in dedication to the infinite task of ethics. Ethics is to be enacted on the plane of history where societies move in the direction of ever greater approximation to the messianic ideal. The 'world to come' is reconfigured by Cohen to a future time of greater peace. 'Immortality acquires the meaning of the historical living-on of the individual in the historical continuity of his people' (ibid. 301). The individual dies but the people does not. Immortality cannot be said to imply anything about a supernatural afterlife. None the less, the deceased individual of routine historic time enters, upon death, a domain of eternal peace. Cohen, somewhat disconcertingly, praises death as the peaceful reward of life, as a 'new beginning' (ibid. 460). As a philosopher, Cohen purged from his Kantianism the practical proof of immortality. As a theologian, however, he retained much traditional Jewish language about immortality but couched it in such obscurity that it is not fully clear what his final teaching is on this matter. See ibid. 301–8; 454–62.

¹³ For Cohen's way of interpreting biblical law as a praxis of humanitarian social ethics, see ibid. esp. ch. 9 (pp. 144–64).

scientifically based socialism that can work towards the holy task. His view is an unalloyed liberal reformism, parallel to the Social Gospel and Progressive movements in the United States, without a hint of irony, tragedy, or reservation. It is in this sense that Cohen embraces the political sphere per se as an object of hope.

Science and faith, Athens and Jerusalem, need one another as they supplement each other's deficiencies. Emblematic of this is the Greek dismissal of hope. 'Greek' philosophy may lead to the *techne* for social amelioration through politics but without 'prophetism' it would lack the motivation to do so. Cohen correctly points out that the Greeks did not, as we have seen, treasure hope as a virtue. Hope was at best 'a sense of personal relief, affecting the imagination of the poor or unhappy individual. Nowhere in paganism does the concept of hope suggest a general enhancement of all human existence'.¹⁴ For philosophically indifferent or misguided private hope to grow into well-grounded social hope requires Jerusalem's faith in the One God. The 'widening out [of private hope]', Cohen writes, 'into the non-personal, ethical realm, this spiritualization of a basically materialistic-personalistic emotion is the effect and indeed one of the surest marks of the idea of God's unity or—what amounts to the same thing—of His pure spirituality. In Old Testament usage, hope and faith are identical'. He continues:

[H]ope is the product as well as the expression of faith in divine providence. And divine providence means neither a concern, first and foremost, with the individual nor exclusively with one's own people, but rather with all mankind as the children of God. Hope for one's own well-being is conducive to vanity. Hope for the well-being and continued existence of one's own people, though possibly conducive to the development of courage and a sacrificial spirit, easily engenders pride as well. And when one's own country experiences a prolonged period of distress, all hope seems to be in vain, adding merely to one's sense of frustration and dejection. But man's hope is transformed into faith when he no longer thinks of himself alone, that is, of his salvation here and now, or of his eternal salvation (the latter, if I may say so, with calculating sanctimoniousness). Hope is transformed into faith when man associates the future with the emergence of a community whose concerns will reach beyond its everyday concrete reality. Such a community will not be composed merely of man's immediate circle of friends or family nor will it

¹⁴ Jospe, *Reason and Hope*, 122.

include only those who share his own cherished beliefs; indeed, it will even cut across the borders of his own country because it will represent the community of mankind. As faith in mankind, Israel's faith is hope. And it is this epitome of Israel's prophetism, this hope in mankind's future, that comprises the substance of the Messianic idea.¹⁵

Here hope is more than an emotion. As an emotion it remains private, feckless, faintly selfish, and therefore morally suspect. But as a path to or path from—Cohen is indistinct—rational faith in God, hope culminates in the messianic idea of a united humanity, living together in peace and justice. That alone is the proper, one might say (although Cohen does not) *virtuous* deployment of hope. The path to this eschaton, the messianic praxis, is social ethics effectuated through socialism.

By socialism Cohen means a just social order in which poverty is eliminated, people rule themselves in a democratic manner, education is universal, and compassion drives public policy. Cohen does not fill out the details of a socialist politics. He takes it for granted that democratic socialism, as it was articulated in Germany in the nineteenth century, is the most just form of political order.¹⁶ Such a socialism would entail a politics of complete equality between human beings. There would no longer be ruler and ruled—Cohen vigorously faults Plato's static division of his republic into a philosophical governing class and a non-philosophical mass. All would participate as equals in a self-governing society.¹⁷ The ever-growing progress towards the achievement of such an order would constitute the messianic age.

It is integral to Cohen's thought, however, that the 'messiah' is always coming but never arriving. The task of ethics is infinite; it never comes to rest. The messianic age is a regulative idea for this infinite moral striving; it is not an empirically possible achievement. This is not to say that we cannot ever more fully approximate it—we can and must. We can be filled with hope at the prospect of ameliorating our world. But we cannot believe that the eschaton will arrive. 'Eschatology' in Cohen's system is distinct from 'messianism'. Eschatology is a

¹⁵ Jospe, *Reason and Hope*, 123–4.

¹⁶ For a bit more detail, as well as a defence of Cohen's demurral on detail, see Schwarzschild, 'The Democratic Socialism of Hermann Cohen', 432–3.

¹⁷ Jospe, *Reason and Hope*, 74–5.

mythological holdover from under-rationalized religion. It imagines a rupture with history and a transformation of nature in a lurid consummation of human time. Messianism, by contrast, is a rational adherence to the moral task; to a moral politics conducted according to moral means. It does not *imagine* the consummation or suspension of history; it *knows* the infinite burden of the ethical. It therefore accepts, hopefully, a patient politics of social amelioration firm in the belief that history—the acts of men—can be drawn ever more into accordance with the moral reason of men. Faith and hope reveal to us that our work is not in vain. The monotheist does not expect a divine guarantee in any supernatural sense (nor a divine reward). What the monotheist knows is that the world is God's world, that ethics is God's creation, and that politics is the means that ethics devises for men and women to 'walk in God's ways' in the matter of social justice.

Cohen's philosophy, the leading modern expression of Jewish rationalism, struggles mightily to wed Kant's theory of knowledge and of ethics to traditional Jewish faith, as exemplified by earlier, demythologizing rationalists such as Maimonides. The Kantian mode, however, bequeaths a disturbing contradiction: we are to believe in ideas, such as the messianic age, with all our hearts while knowing that they are, at best, necessary and useful fictions. Cohen would object strenuously to putting it this way—the 'regulative idea' is not arbitrary or a will-o'-the-wisp in the way 'fiction' implies—but the criticism is none the less valid. Cohen would have us banish all pessimism and despair, which a consideration of the bloodbath of history could easily inspire, as based on fear rather than knowledge. We know, in the way that we know moral truth and moral duty, that peace is the constitutive idea of the moral sphere and that hope and faith are its allies. As a philosophical idealist, Cohen believes that such ideas *are* reality in its highest expression. Disconfirming evidence cannot truly disconfirm, for the ideas are insulated against assault by their own ideal coherence with one another. Similarly, socialism would not be disconfirmed by, for example, its poor performance as an economic model or by the cost in coercion that one must pay for a socialist politics. Nor would German liberal politics be disconfirmed by its collapse before Nazi dictatorship. The idea, in its purity, is the thing or, more precisely, *ought to be* the thing. It is the 'ought', the messianic

pull the idea exerts on every prevailing reality, that defines reality in its highest expression.

Cohen thus exemplifies what Max Weber, within months of Cohen's death, describes as 'an ethics of pure intention' (*Gesinnungsethik*).¹⁸ Scornful of consequences and tethered to the highest values, the *Gesinnungsethiker* engages in political action albeit under the sign of essentially apolitical ideals. It is not that Cohen was overly optimistic about Germany; it is that he was overly idealistic about knowledge, conduct, and politics. The Cohenian State is in itself an ideal: a normative elevation of unequal social classes and natural groupings into a transcendent realm of equality. The State is per se a step on the way to the messianic future. Cohen thus gives the idea of politics as the stratagem of messianism too free a rein.¹⁹ As such, Cohen invests the full passion of his moral idealism into the fragile vessel of politics. Yet, his politics is curiously un-political. A politics driven by moral yearning and oriented towards moral perfection fails to be politics in a practical sense, which is what politics *is*. Cohen's politics eschews power, the very medium of politics, for a rapturous focus on justice. But how can justice be approximated without a responsible deployment of power? Cohen, in the end, embraces an ethic of powerlessness; he affirms the inevitability and messianic symbolism of Jewish suffering. But, it is fair to say to Cohen, with apologies to Lord Acton, that powerlessness, too, corrupts and absolute powerlessness corrupts absolutely. It is unfair, as always, to criticize Cohen for failing to see the direction in which his *Vaterland* was headed. But it is fair to criticize his optimism, however densely argued, about the eventual triumph of the good, through human moral exertion, to be played out on the stage of politics. Cohen's disciple, Franz Rosenzweig, deployed precisely that critique.

Franz Rosenzweig: Judaism as an Anti-politics

Rosenzweig both accepted and rejected elements of Cohen's social thought. As mentioned above, Rosenzweig rejected Cohen's most liberal convictions: Jewish assimilationism, German nationalism,

¹⁸ Mittleman, 'Politics as a Vocation: Some American Considerations', *Notre Dame Journal of Law, Ethics and Public Policy*, 20 (2006), 279–94.

¹⁹ See Cohen, *Ethik des reinen Willens*, 32.

democratic socialism, gradualist and reformist politics as a strategy of messianism. All these meet with a sweeping rejection in Rosenzweig's vast metaphysical portrayal of the structure of Jewish and Christian life. By the same token, Rosenzweig retains Cohen's *Gesinnungsethik*, the ethic of pure intention, as the *modus vivendi* of Jewish life in an ahistorical, apolitical eternal now (*nunc stans*). The Jewish people are outside of time, misunderstood and scorned by the nations, nourished by their own divine fire burning at the heart of a universe configured into a 'star of redemption'.²⁰ Additionally, Rosenzweig's emphasis on the Jewish people—his redemptive theology of community—while apolitical none the less carries forward themes of German nationalism that Rosenzweig rejected in Cohen and in his culture at large.²¹

Rosenzweig envisions a cosmic division of labour. The Jewish people are exempt from the laws of history. They neither develop nor change. They live an eternal life, ordered by the timeless cycle of the Jewish liturgical year.²² The Jews anticipate a final redemption, but they also live it in the timelessness of the present. 'Eternity', Rosenzweig writes, 'is not a very long time, but a tomorrow that just as well could

²⁰ Rosenzweig's masterwork, *The Star of Redemption*, is a poetic-philosophical construction of great ingenuity and ambition. It attempts to give, in a sense familiar from German idealism (which it strenuously rejects), a narrative of the genesis, trajectory, and destination of the entire tissue of reality. For Rosenzweig, this tissue is composed of the 'elements' 'God', 'man', and 'world'. The story of reality is the story of the interaction of these elements, the deepening of the relationships among them, and their eventual consummation in unity. He depicts these relations pictorially as a six-pointed star—the Jewish symbol of the *magen David*, or shield of David—adopted by German and other modern Jews as an emblem. A recent English translation, by Barbara Galli, goes some way towards clarifying this notoriously obscure and expressionistic work (see Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. Barbara E. Galli (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005)). There are hundreds if not thousands of studies of Rosenzweig. Many, alas, replicate rather than resolve his obscurity. One that is particularly helpful from the point of view of his political thought is Peter Eli Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Between Judaism and German Philosophy* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2003). See also Gordon's chapter, 'Franz Rosenzweig and the Philosophy of Jewish Existence', in Morgan and Gordon, *Cambridge Companion to Modern Jewish Philosophy*, 122–46.

²¹ Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger*, 113–16.

²² Typical of what Rosenzweig writes on this is the following: 'We alone cannot imagine this sort of time [when our nation will pass away]; for everything in which the existence of peoples takes root, has long ago been taken away from us; land, language, custom and law long ago departed from the sphere of the living and for us is raised from the living to the holy; but we, we are still living and live eternally. Our life is no longer interwoven with anything external, we have taken root in ourselves, without roots in the

be today. Eternity is a future, which, without ceasing to be future, is nevertheless present. Eternity is a today that would be conscious of being more than today'.²³ The festivals of the year provide a grammar for the speech of the Jewish community. The speech of the community is one endless prayer. It is in the depth of the experience of the community that the individual Jew finds orientation and realization. Eternal liturgical life, not political struggle in a historical world, governs the life rhythms of the Jewish people. The liturgical forms 'are the light in which we behold the light', '[a] calm anticipation of a world shining in the silence of the future'.²⁴

The Church, by contrast, represents the dynamic process of the universe—the light that streams out of the Jewish fire at the heart of the star. The Jews live beyond time; the Church lives in the midst of time. It copes with time by mastering it—by creating a division in time, the Christian epoch.²⁵ The Church is all about struggle and transformation in the midst of the world, yearning to achieve what for the Jews is already given: a final, transfigured form. The Church wrestles with its own internal contradiction. It is both Jewish and Gentile, biblical and pagan. The struggle over history and politics that constitutes the world derives from the inner struggle of the Christian soul: Siegfried is at war with Jesus. Restlessness and tension drive the world process. Christianity must spread and convert all of pagan humanity; it must as well convert the paganism within itself. The Jewish people, by contrast, has no work of divine rescue to perform in the world. The Jews are 'already at the goal towards which the peoples of the world are just starting out'.

That goal is the 'inner harmony of faith and life', of *fides* and *salus*.²⁶ The encounter with God and the tasks of daily life must be at one with one another. For Christianity, which is wedded to history in a way that the Jews are not, the tasks of history, politics, and war must become holy politics and holy war. The conversion of the world is at stake and

earth, eternal wanderers therefore, yet deeply rooted in ourselves, in our own body and blood. And this rooting in ourselves and only in ourselves guarantees our eternity for us' (Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, 324).

²³ Ibid. 241 (see also 306–7).

²⁴ Ibid. 312.

²⁵ The Jews find eternity above time, in the timeless law and liturgy. The Church finds eternity by making the Christian Epoch an eternal present, a *nunc stans*. Ibid. 360.

²⁶ Ibid. 351.

these are its means. For the Jewish people, all war, however tragically it may affect them, is mere war. All of that is behind them; they have no stake in it. (Their holy war against the Canaanites was long in the past. It is one of the worldly things 'taken away' from the Jews when they entered eternity.) The Jew is the only genuine pacifist; he cannot take war seriously.²⁷ The same is true of politics. The Jews are beyond the political.

This makes it sound as if Jews have nothing to hope for, as if they can simply immerse themselves in the depth of the present without expectation. That, however, is emphatically not Rosenzweig's view. The Jews have something to hope for—redemption. What redemption means and how it is achieved, however, conditions the hope that Jews are supposed to have. Unlike modern believers in progress, such as Kant and Cohen, the Jew, for Rosenzweig, animates the coming future with the possibility that the Kingdom can come *now*. The belief in progress flattens *eternity*, in his special sense of the term, into *infinity*: a string of qualitatively similar moments stretched out into a forever. Unlike the believer in progress, the Jew who believes in eternity believes that the Kingdom of God is capable of arriving at any time. It is not set off into a far future. Through the liturgical life, the Jewish people takes action—its own peculiar kind of action—to 'knock at the locked door' of the world and to make 'the Messiah arrive before his time'.²⁸ But what kind of action does liturgical life embody? Is there still here some sort of politics, however transfigured, as in Cohen's transference of an ethics of compassion into a democratic socialism? Not at all. Rosenzweig writes of the action that anticipates the future Kingdom of God:

Owing to this anticipation, growing and taking action become eternal. But what is it that they are anticipating? Nothing other than—each other. The taking action of the soul, turned consciously and actively toward the given neighbor in the moment, obviously anticipates the whole world in the will. And the growth of the Kingdom in the world, when it anticipates in hope the end for the moment that is coming—what could it expect for this moment that is coming if not the act of love?²⁹

The Kingdom for which Jews and Christians pray is a world where love prevails, where there is, accordingly, nothing left to pray for.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid. 244.

²⁹ Ibid. 244–5.

The union of the soul with the whole world, having taken place in the act of thanks, the Kingdom of God has come—for this Kingdom is nothing other than the mutual union of the soul and the world—and every prayer that was ever possible is answered.³⁰

And this can happen, according to Rosenzweig, at any time. For Cohen, the end in principle could not come; for Rosenzweig, the end *must* come. And ‘God himself must speak the last word—there cannot be any word afterwards. For, there must be an end, and no longer merely anticipation of it’.³¹ God, not the ethics and politics of man, is truly the agent of redemption. Man’s only agency is love and prayer; politics avails nothing.³²

Rosenzweig comes to this radically apolitical or anti-political view from his reading of Hegel and his rejection of Hegelianism. This was no casual affair. He wrote and later published his doctoral dissertation under the title of *Hegel and the State* (*Hegel und der Staat*). Rosenzweig traces Hegel’s mature doctrine of the state back to the concerns of his early theological writings. In the mature doctrine, the state is the ultimate embodiment of reason which overcomes all of the contradictions of being and of history. This view is already heralded, on Rosenzweig’s interpretation, in Hegel’s youthful writings on Judaism and Christianity. Hegel sees Judaism as ensnared in the bitter stalemate of fate.³³ Judaism suffers from a twofold contradiction: its God is irreconcilably divided from the world and the Jews are irreconcilably divided from other peoples. Fate is division without reconciliation. Christianity overcomes the first of these divisions through Incarnation. It overcomes the second in principle by the universality of its constitution of a new elect people of God. In practice, however, Jesus and his followers were isolated and persecuted; like the Jews they were set apart from the world and its politics. They lived in ‘tragic seclusion’ from the political sphere, instantiating their own holy Kingdom of God at the margins of the political.³⁴ Hegel’s mature doctrine of the

³⁰ The Jews find eternity above time, in the timeless law and liturgy. The Church finds eternity by making the Christian Epoch an eternal present, a *nunc stans*. Ibid. 250–1 (see also 252).

³¹ Ibid. 255.

³² Rosenzweig works out the relationship among love, prayer, action, and community (ibid. 283–93).

³³ Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger*, 91–113.

³⁴ Ibid. 99.

state, as the overcoming of all contradictions, was inspired, according to Rosenzweig, by his youthful reflection on fate and reconciliation but moved, obviously, beyond Christianity. Rosenzweig, however, took Hegel's negative characterization of Judaism and embraced it. He adapted Hegel's characterization of Jesus' tragic seclusion from the political and applied it to the Jewish people. The building of the Kingdom of God through communal, albeit apolitical, holiness, of instantiating eternity in the midst of time becomes the *raison d'être* of the Jews. The dialectical struggle through history towards reconciliation and liberation from fate becomes the mission of the Church.

As much as Rosenzweig tries to isolate the Jews from politics and sequester their action into a sphere of liturgical performance, the Jews on Rosenzweig's account still need to do something else. They need to reproduce. Unlike the Christians, who need to win souls, the Jews need to have babies. Biology, not mission, ensures their eternity.³⁵ Here Rosenzweig's extraordinarily anti-political view shows its Achilles heel. The perpetuation of 'Jewish blood', a charged term which Rosenzweig does not shrink from using, cannot simply mean 'having Jewish babies'.³⁶ It would be meaningless to bring Jewish children into a world where they cannot grow and mature into Jewish adults and thus carry out their own generative responsibilities. The perpetuation of the Jews perforce entails attention to securing conditions where Jewish life is viable. It entails, therefore, attention to politics. Rosenzweig thus stumbles into a grave contradiction. He systematically and on principle must scant a dimension of human experience on which his own view must nevertheless rely. The logic of his own position ought to compel him to take historicity and politics seriously as conditions for Jewish survival.

It is tempting to view history and politics—worldliness—as a reality from which the 'eternal people' can remain aloof. This is certainly a

³⁵ See, e.g., Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, 318: 'Whereas every other community that lays claim to eternity must make arrangements to pass the torch of the present on to the future, only the community of the same blood does not have need of making such arrangements for the tradition; it does not need to trouble its mind; in the natural propagation of the body it has the guarantee of its eternity.' Rosenzweig also has some very suggestive, if obscure, thoughts here on hope for the future and its guarantee in the present for Jews and for non-Jews (p. 317).

³⁶ For an analysis of what Rosenzweig means by 'blood', see Leora Batnitzky, *Idolatry and Representation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 74–6, and Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger*, 210–14.

deep temptation within Christianity, as evidenced at least as early as the second-century Epistle of Diognetus. It has been less of a temptation among the Jews, although Rosenzweig is a fascinating example of it. But, the reality is otherwise. The real story of Jewish survival, 'real' for those who take history seriously, is that Jews survived because they understood the political challenges of a stateless existence. They operated with political skill in dangerous environments as a stateless but none the less organized collectivity. Far from being aloof to politics, Jews pioneered a mode of diasporic political life that was acutely realistic, worldly, and historically efficacious.³⁷ Jews of a certain metaphysical cast of mind can derive a sense of strength from Rosenzweigan aloofness towards politics but it is doubtful that the Jewish people as a whole could have survived if it had institutionalized this aloofness in its common life. Rosenzweig gives us little more than a prescription for pariah status; for what Hannah Arendt called 'worldlessness'.

Martin Buber: Politics on the Narrow Ridge

Martin Buber may seem an unlikely candidate to exemplify a realistic and moderate hope for politics. Readers are likely to know of Buber as the great exponent of the radical and authentic relationship and as a relentless critic of all forms of interaction (such as politics) that stultify our ability to relate to one another with depth and totality. Buber's 1923 book *I and Thou* is a classic of twentieth-century religious thought. It purports to describe two modes of attitude towards the world, enunciated by the compound words I-You and I-It. Much of how we interact—with other human beings, with animals and plants, and with 'spiritual beings' such as artistic inspirations—occurs in the mode of 'experience and use', of I-It. Both the 'I' and the 'It' are reduced and constricted by the relation of having, using, or embedding in established patterns of experience. In the full, exclusive, spontaneous opening of an I to a You, however, both beings instantaneously

³⁷ The modern recovery of the Jewish political tradition owes much to such scholars as Ismar Schorsch, Daniel J. Elazar, David Biale, Michael Walzer, Menachem Lorberbaum, and Ruth Wisse. For a review of some of the relevant literature, see Mittleman, *The Politics of Torah* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), 25–48; also id., review of Michael Walzer, et al., *The Jewish Political Tradition*, i. *Authority* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000), in *Jewish Political Studies Review*, 13 (2001), 3–4.

become the utmost that they can be only to fall back, inevitably, into withdrawal and constriction. Real living, Buber writes, is meeting. But it is our 'melancholy lot' that real meeting fades quickly into the 'it world' once again. Transience is our lot but we also glimpse a horizon beyond the transience of encounter. All the genuine meetings that we have point towards our meeting with the Eternal You; the You who properly can never become an It. The lines of every I–You encounter converge in God, whom Buber insists should only be addressed as You and not conceptualized or described as a He, She, or It. The Eternal You is the guarantor of all true relation.³⁸ In an imaginative synthesis, unparalleled in modern letters, Buber wed the spirituality of Hasidism to the moral conscience of Kant, the social criticism of German sociology, and the aestheticism of neo-Romanticism. A teaching such as this seems on its surface to leave little room for something as low, compromised, and messy as politics.

Yet, Buber's thought, however indebted to predecessors like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, did not drive him into an apolitical religiosity or dismissive contempt for the inherited forms of the bourgeois world. Precisely because relations rather than objects stand at the centre of his metaphysics he had to be concerned for the quality of all relations, especially those that constitute community, society, nation, and state. Buber does have profound streaks of antinomianism, anarchism, utopianism, and revolution in him. They militate against his realism. But, his realism also proves itself in tension with his utopian yearnings. Buber in actual fact practised a patient politics of 'a thousand small decisions', constantly struggling to translate the impossible ideal of I–You encounter into the rough medium of political practice.³⁹ His often inflated rhetoric notwithstanding, he never took flight into pure

³⁸ The views summarized here are found throughout Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Touchstone, 1996).

³⁹ The phrase is from a speech Buber delivered to the Sixteenth Zionist Congress in 1929. He asserted that the time for great ideological declarations has come to an end and that henceforth only conscientious responsibility effectuated in a thousand small decisions would do. See Paul Mendes-Flohr (ed.), *A Land of Two Peoples: Martin Buber on Jews and Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 80. Mendes-Flohr's introduction to this is an indispensable analysis of Buber's political thought (see esp. 16–22). Additional important studies of Buber's political thought are: Robert Weltsch, 'Buber's Political Philosophy', in Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman (eds.), *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, Library of Living Philosophers, 12 (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court Press, 1967) and Bernard Susser, *Existence and Utopia: The Social and Political Thought of Martin Buber* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1981).

political phantasm. He may have been inspired by the prophets, but he did not pretend to be one. He remained what Michael Walzer calls a 'connected critic'.⁴⁰

The principal venue for Buber's political engagement was Zionism. As a youth, he became a follower of Theodor Herzl and in his own right a founder of the Zionist movement. A mystically inclined albeit highly unorthodox religionist he quickly became a critic of both Herzl and political Zionism. The achievement of 'mere' statehood was never sufficient for Buber's vision for the spiritual and communal renewal of the Jewish people. As a mature post-mystical philosopher of dialogue and encounter, Buber argued for a bi-national state of Jews and Arabs. After the utter failure of his political vision in 1948, Buber remained an insider, a member of the loyal opposition. He never repudiated Israel or Zionism. Buber insisted that the touchstone of his philosophy of I and You remain its relevance to the real crises of human life, especially the life of the Jewish people restored to their land.

Precisely because Buber held to a very high view of what ought to prevail among human beings, his political thought is rife with tension. His realism is hard won. Recalling his friend, the Munich revolutionary leader, Gustav Landauer's death at the hands of reactionary soldiers in the aftermath of the First World War, Buber spoke of the immense struggle of political actors to retain integrity and personal responsibility. He speaks of both Landauer, who was among those who attempted to seize power, and of the right-wing soldiers who killed him. The 'true front', he wrote

runs through the heart of the soldier, the true front runs through the heart of the revolutionary. The true front runs through each party and through each adherent of a party, through each group and through each member of a group. On the true front each fights against his fellows and against himself, and only through the decisions of these battles is he given full power for other decisions.⁴¹

His point is that no political agent should permit himself to flee from personal responsibility by merely following orders, serving a cause, or towing a party line. Each must wrestle with conscience to determine what is in truth permitted to one. How far is one allowed to go in the

⁴⁰ Michael Walzer, *The Company of Critics* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 20; 64–79.

⁴¹ 'Recollection of a Death', in Buber, *Pointing the Way: Collected Essays*, ed. Maurice Friedman (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1990), 119–20.

direction of injustice? At what point do impure means pollute pure ends? Buber called upon each person to find his or her own 'front' or 'line of demarcation' beyond which it is intolerable to go.⁴² He did not think that there are any fixed rules, authoritative codes, or permanent bright lines to mark these fronts. His ethics is situational, responsive, and personalistic. Addressing the dilemma of a member of a party who believes in the goals of the party but is surrounded by people who, for whatever reason, are willing to use means whose nature contradicts the party's goals, Buber writes:

Here, too, one is obliged not to proceed on principle, but only to advance ever again in the responsibility of the line of demarcation and to answer for it; not in order to keep one's soul clean of blood—that would be a vain and wretched enterprise—but in order to guard against means being chosen that will lead away from the cherished goal to another goal essentially similar to those [invidious] means; for the end never sanctifies the means, but the means can certainly thwart the end.⁴³

Buber's lifelong struggle to hold together both 'existence' and 'Utopia', the push of life in the 'It-world' and the pull of life towards the You-world, precluded a simple bifurcation of politics here, ethics there. He rejected the dichotomy of the *Gesinnungsethiker* in which moral purity is opposed to politics and moral purity must prevail. (Cohen thought that moral purity could prevail in a moral, socialist politics. He gave himself over wholeheartedly to socialism. Rosenzweig knew that it could not and withheld himself entirely from the political sphere.) Buber thought such moral purity dogmatic or doctrinaire; a feckless idealism. The idea has not yet entered the concreteness of life. But, Buber also rejected the formulation, which Max Weber juxtaposed to *Gesinnungsethik*, of an ethic of responsibility (*Verantwortungsethik*). From the latter point of view, politics and ethics are also structurally opposed but one must do one's best, under political circumstances, to do one's duty, without regard to purist moral inhibitions. Or, more precisely, politics brings with it its own moral responsibilities. To act according to pure or apolitical moral considerations in the midst of politics is to offend against

⁴² For a political instance of Buber's use of the metaphor of a line of demarcation, see Buber, *Paths in Utopia* (New York: Collier Books, 1988), 134.

⁴³ 'The Validity and Limitation of the Political Principle', in Buber, *Pointing the Way*, 218.

political morality. It is to offend against what a *political* actor must responsibly do.

Buber's actual political praxis is in accord with Weber's *Verantwortungsethik*, but he rejects this view on theoretical grounds because he rejects its underlying assumption of value pluralism. He is opposed to setting off politics as a separate sphere in the manner of Weber or, more invidiously, of Carl Schmitt. Unlike Weber, Buber cannot agree to a fundamental bifurcation of reality into the sacred and the profane; that presumptive binary is at the heart of the modern malaise for Buber.⁴⁴ Politics cannot be structurally separate from ethics because ethics is not a codified, extraordinary sphere (à la Cohen) separate from real life. Ethics/politics is constituted by an authentic response to the demands of the hour. Reality and ideal, is and ought, are not static polarities, staring at each other across an ontological divide. They are living forces struggling in a human being faced with a decision. Responding to the need of the hour *is* the sacred. Buber's pan-sacramental metaphysics sees all of life as opening towards God. No sphere of human endeavour is truly separate, distinct, or permanently pluralized. One must work in the world to overcome its ostensible divisions and raise its hidden sparks towards the holy.

We can only work on the kingdom of God through working on all the spheres of man that are allotted to us. There is no universally valid choice of means to serve the purpose. One cannot say, we must work here and not there, this leads to the goal and that does not. We cannot prepare the messianic world, we can only prepare for it. There is no legitimately messianic, no legitimately messianically-intended politics. But that does not imply that the political sphere may be excluded from the hallowing of all things. The political 'serpent' is not essentially evil, it is itself only misled; it, too, ultimately wants to be redeemed. It does not avail to strike at it, it does not avail to turn away from it. It belongs with the creaturely world: we must have to do with it, without inflexible principles, in naked responsibility.⁴⁵

To the extent that we can talk of separate spheres, of pluralism, in Buber, we can talk only of 'the sphere of wholeness' and the 'sphere of separation'. Wholeness is normative; it is the world of immediate relation to the You. Only in relation to the You is the I whole. Separation is real but incomplete. Political action, which is work in

⁴⁴ Mendes-Flohr, *Land of Two Peoples*, 18.

⁴⁵ 'Gandhi, Politics and Us', in Buber, *Pointing the Way*, 137.

the sphere of separation 'receives its legitimacy from the sphere of wholeness'.⁴⁶ If we give to God our wholeness, we learn hour by hour how to lead our political lives in the un-whole sphere of the state. That sphere, which Buber calls 'the political principle', has legitimacy but only in tension with 'the sphere of wholeness'. It is a tentative legitimacy. If the political principle were to swallow all things, as Hegel intended, it would lose its tentative validity. Buber, like his French Protestant contemporary, Jacques Ellul, both validated and criticized the political dimension of life according to a religious vision of ultimacy.

The 'naked responsibility', the danger and risk of acting politically, is captured by Buber in the metaphor of the 'narrow ridge'.⁴⁷ A serious life is a precarious business. A person must struggle to retain balance as abysses loom on every side. The abyss takes the form of a false dichotomy, such as faith vs. doubt, sacred vs. profane, individualism vs. collectivism, state vs. society, *vita activa* vs. *vita contemplativa*, or realism vs. utopianism. All of these static oppositions, these 'tyrannies of the Either-Or', are untrue to the lived experience of the person facing a decision.⁴⁸ In all such instances Buber struggled to find a third way, which was not merely a compromise between the two but a genuine alternative, a hard-won outlook or decision balanced on a narrow ridge. In his writings on education, for example, he rejected the standard alternatives of discipline vs. self-expression in favour of a third way: nurturing the ability of the student to achieve an open *relation* with the world.⁴⁹ He constantly pressed the reality of the 'between', the relation between beings as a neglected but crucial dimension of life. Buber resisted the massive turn towards the subjective, as Charles Taylor put it, that characterizes modernity. Real life is meeting; the *Zwischenmenschliche* or inter-human. But how can something as evanescent, precious, and transformative as relation or meeting, the encounter of I and You, constitute a politics? I and You are about being, not making. One does not have to be a Marxist and believe that man is essentially *homo faber* to believe that we are *typically*

⁴⁶ Ibid. 213.

⁴⁷ For an explanation of Buber's use of this term, see one of several biographies of him by his disciple Maurice Friedman, *Encounter on the Narrow Ridge: A Life of Martin Buber* (New York: Paragon House, 1991), 43–5; also Susser, *Existence and Utopia*, 33–53.

⁴⁸ The phrase 'tyranny of the Either-Or' is Susser's (*Existence and Utopia*, 43).

⁴⁹ 'Education', in Buber, *Between Man and Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 89.

makers of worlds. What does the cherished possibility of relation have to do with the making of movements, leaders, ideologies, followers; with power, authority, justice, and law?

To a certain extent, Buber takes the political world as a given and teaches how one may work within it with realism and integrity. However, that working within entails a constant constructive criticism. Buber ceaselessly criticized the pretensions of the state as an artificial Leviathan as against a more humanly scaled society and community. He criticized nationalism as against the nation. Similarly, he criticized centralization as against subsidiarity and federalism. (I leave aside Buber's views about the making or founding of political orders, which are found in his studies of biblical theocracy, utopian socialism and *kibbutzim*, and the bi-national state of Arabs and Jews to which he dedicated his Zionist activity.) Buber was not only a teacher of morality within the circumstances of an existing politics. He was also a political visionary, a utopian. None the less, it is his realism—his work and criticism within the given—on which we focus here. So, what does life on a narrow ridge, hoping for relation with the human and the divine You, mean for a worldly politics?

Buber writes:

I believe that it is possible to serve God and the group to which one belongs if one is courageously intent on serving God in the sphere of the group as much as one can. As much as one can at the time; 'quantum satis' means in the language of lived truth not 'either-or', but 'as-much-as-one-can'. If the political organization of existence does not infringe on my wholeness and immediacy, it may demand of me that I do justice to it at any particular time as far as, in a given inner conflict, I believe I am able to answer for. At any particular time; for here there is no once-for-all: in each situation that demands decision the demarcation line between service and service must be drawn anew—not necessarily with fear, but necessarily with that trembling of the soul that precedes every genuine decision.⁵⁰

Decision within the context of politics—decision on the narrow ridge—must always respond to the imperative of *quantum satis*: how much is necessary. Buber uses this Latin phrase repeatedly in his political writings. Like his phrase 'line of demarcation' it suggests an uncertain, transient border between too little and too much, between the violation of one's integrity and the enactment of one's integrity in a deed.

⁵⁰ 'The Validity and Limitation of the Political Principle', in id., *Pointing the Way*, 217.

The one writing in which Buber explicitly takes up the theme of hope and politics is a lecture that he delivered, in Carnegie Hall, at the end of his American lecture tour in 1952. The context is the Cold War. Buber was asked whether there is 'hope for this hour' and if so what form it can take. What hope means is the 'prospect of a time of radiant and full living', the expectation of a time where the fundamental sickness of modern humanity has been overcome.⁵¹ That sickness is called by Buber 'existential mistrust'. Buber is struck by the degree to which political ideology frustrates the possibility of humane dialogue between persons in opposing political blocks. People have always divided into groups, nations, sects, and so on such that distrust of the stranger, foreigner, or other has been the norm. The alienation of man from man in modernity, however, is more fundamental.

In pre-modern times, one might fear with good reason that another is lying or misrepresenting himself. Mistrust was a normal hedging of one's bets against the possibly malign intentions of another. In politicized modernity, however, mistrust has nothing to do with intention. We assume that our ideological antagonists—Buber has in mind the Communist bloc—mean what they say but that what they say is *in toto* irremediably wrong. Furthermore, they cannot help but say it. They are prisoners of an ideology as, in their eyes, are we. What one says and what one means no longer have moral standing. The other can have no claim on me; can make no contribution to my understanding of myself or my world. The other needs to be deconstructed. He thinks and speaks wholly on account of his class interests (Marx) or out of complexes generated by a repressed sexuality (Freud). The other is unreachable, as am I to him. Where ideology stunts encounter, no human meeting between persons is possible. Buber sums up the gravity of the situation thus:

The existential mistrust is indeed basically no longer, like the old kind, a mistrust of my fellow-man. It is rather the destruction of confidence in existence in general. That we can no longer carry on a genuine dialogue from one camp to the other is the severest symptom of the sickness of present-day man. Existential mistrust is this sickness itself. But the destruction of trust in human existence is the inner poisoning of the total human organism from which this sickness stems.⁵²

⁵¹ 'Hope for this Hour', *ibid.* 220.

⁵² *Ibid.* 224.

Buber does not deny that class interests or neuroses—the typical tropes of deconstruction in his day—play a role in shaping what persons think or say. He does deny that they exhaust the possibilities for interpreting the thought or speech of another. We must draw ‘demarcation lines’ around our practice of unmasking or seeing through another; we must allow ourselves to be human in his presence and see him in ‘his manifoldness and his wholeness’, in his proper character, without preconceptions. In short, Buber calls for a genuine dialogue between East and West.

Buber indicts the political as the sphere in which the entrapment of the other by ideology has occurred. The willingness to encounter the other as a being like ourselves ruptures the malign hold of the political. On the other hand, Buber’s concrete proposal for how to do this is eminently political, albeit slightly utopian. He believes that representatives of divided peoples who have the confidence of their nations but who also are capable of independent thought ought to meet and struggle to find common ground. That common ground should simply be what man needs in order to live as a man. ‘For if the globe is not to burst asunder, every man must be given what he needs for a really human life. Coming together out of hostile camps, those who stand in the authority of the spirit will dare to think with one another in terms of the whole planet’.⁵³ Without the possibility of dialogical immediacy between persons from the opposing, hostile camps, there is no ‘hope for this hour’. The possibility of hope, however, ‘depends upon the hoppers themselves, upon ourselves’.⁵⁴ The hoppers must raise a protest against the dehumanizing ideological systems that cripple their capacity for relation. They must speak the ‘word without which no healing takes place: I will live’.

Buber’s proposal here harks back to a similarly earnest but feckless venture on the eve of the First World War. At Easter in 1914, Buber and a group of like-minded European intellectuals of spiritual bent assembled to form a ‘supra-national authority’, which would in some way be able to sway opinion in their home countries and diffuse tension. Buber recalls this politically hapless meeting in a later essay as a great triumph of genuine encounter. Although its political accomplishment was nugatory, its spiritual contribution was abiding.⁵⁵ This

⁵³ ‘Hope for this Hour’, 228. ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Buber’s account of the 1914 meeting is found in ‘Dialogue’, *Between Man and Man*, 5–6.

view is unintelligible without reference to Buber's writings on biblical leadership where he repeatedly claims that failure rather than success marks the work of the typical biblical leader. Whereas profane history counts only unalloyed success as valuable, 'the Bible knows nothing of this intrinsic value of success. On the contrary, when it announces a successful deed, it is duty-bound to announce in complete detail the failure involved in the success'. Buber draws examples from the life of Moses and concludes that his 'work, it is true, survives him but only in new defeats, new disappointments, and continual new failures—and yet this work survives also in a hope that is beyond all these failures'.⁵⁶ Thus, genuine leadership—leadership which facilitates genuine encounter—works through politics but does not expect success in politics. Or, rather, it recognizes that all political success is tinged with failure and that real success, the overcoming of human estrangement, outpaces the political. It is enacted, however transiently, by other means. Buber in this way validates the political while simultaneously relativizing it. Hope cannot neglect politics but neither can it trust in it unequivocally.

Walter Rauschenbusch: The Social Gospel of Hope

Rauschenbusch is chiefly known as the leading advocate of the Social Gospel, a late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century movement of renewal in American Protestantism. The Social Gospel sought to cope with the attendant miseries of rapid industrialization and urbanization; it criticized the laissez-faire capitalism which brought both prosperity and vast income inequality in its train, the latter made explicit by the Newport 'cottages' of Gilded Age millionaires and the proliferating urban slums of an industrial proletariat. In its discernment of patterns of injustice that exceeded individual malevolence and seemed to reside in social forces and structure as such, the Social Gospel movement went beyond the explanatory frameworks of previous Protestantism. The resources of American Protestantism, although often focused on social amelioration—as, for example, in abolitionism earlier in the century—had, by the late nineteenth century narrowed to a focus on individual

⁵⁶ 'Biblical Leadership', in Asher D. Biemann (ed.), *The Martin Buber Reader: Essential Writings* (New York: Macmillan, 2002), 36.

conversion (the 'old-fashioned gospel') as the means to social amelioration. On the one side, Protestants endorsed the old evangelical, revivalist faith in personal acceptance of Christ as the only basis for moral regeneration and social improvement.⁵⁷ They acknowledged that much in American society needed improvement in order for the Kingdom of God to arrive but they sought to secure that improvement one soul at a time. On the other side, some Protestants accepted the new social-Darwinist inflected 'Gospel of Wealth', which validated and encouraged individual prosperity. 'It is your duty', preached the popular Philadelphia Baptist minister, Russell Conwell, 'to get rich'.⁵⁸ They acquiesced in the basic justice of the status quo and urged everyone to be responsible for their own entry into it. Both these orientations stressed the individual experience of grace and subsequent moral agency as the locus of hope. Neither considered the structural problems of modern society per se; their vernaculars only knew the first person singular. The Social Gospel movement was meant to change the focus.

In *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, Rauschenbusch argues that Christianity is primarily to be understood as an extension and universalization of the social criticism and constructivism of the Israelite prophets. Religion addresses the dilemmas of society as such. These are more than the cumulative dilemmas of individuals. Rauschenbusch's work is an effort at recall. Just as Israelite prophetic religion, with its clear-eyed view of social dysfunction and its hope for a kingdom of God on earth, degenerated into apocalypticism and rabbinic legalism, so too the social Christianity of Jesus and the primitive church declined into otherworldliness, Constantinianism, and personal quests for salvation. Religion must fully re-appropriate the social and

⁵⁷ The temperance movement, eventually leading to Prohibition, is an exception to this generalization, but even there the social dimensions of the problem of alcoholism were essentially reduced to a personal failing. Advocates of temperance were entirely unrealistic and utopian in what they thought the reduction or elimination of alcohol would accomplish for society. They saw alcohol as the last obstacle to achieving the kingdom of God in a glorious, Protestant Christian America. Their lack of realism in assessing the social problems engendered by alcohol use, let alone the policy disaster of Prohibition, illustrates the consequences of too great a stress on individuals at the expense of sociological, political, and economic analysis. See Robert T. Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 128–30.

⁵⁸ Frank Lambert, *Religion in American Politics: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 83.

political dimensions of existence, within properly requisite idioms. To recover the social consciousness of Jesus and the early church would be to recapture, as well, the deepest impulses of Protestantism. It would be to return to the sources in the Protestant spirit of sola scriptura. Rauschenbusch, as a liberal Protestant in the tradition of Albrecht Ritschl and Wilhelm Hermann (Cohen's Marburg colleague), uses contemporary biblical critical scholarship to unearth the prophetic teaching of Jesus and its partial embodiment in the early church.⁵⁹ That prophetic–social outlook should, forever after, be normative.

Rauschenbusch begins with a generous political Hebraism, that is, with a reading of the Hebrew Scriptures as sources for political wisdom. When Christians have 'caught the spirit that burned in the hearts of the prophets and breathed in gentle humanity through the Mosaic Law, the influence of the Old Testament has been one of the great permanent forces making for democracy and social justice'.⁶⁰ The prophets consummate a shift from ritual, virtually shamanic religion to ethics and righteousness ('the only thing God cares about'), a shift noticed somewhat later by Weber, Jaspers, and others.⁶¹ The province of religion is now properly focused on 'the broad reaches of civic affairs and international relations'; the religious ideal becomes 'politics in the name of God'.⁶² Unlike the priests and their institutional–sacramental successors in later Judaism and Christianity, the prophets both preached and practised 'active participation in public action and discussion'.⁶³

⁵⁹ Paul Tillich, *Perspectives on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-century Protestant Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 215–19.

⁶⁰ Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis in the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Harper One, 2007), 2. This is a reissue of Rauschenbusch's 1907 edition, edited by his great grandson, Paul Raushenbush with commentaries by contemporary enthusiasts of social justice, including Rauschenbusch's grandson, the late philosopher Richard Rorty. The reissue of the book speaks to the perennial appeal of the Social Gospel among American liberals and liberal Christians. It is also timely for another reason—namely, the growing interest in 'political Hebraism', that is, the impact on Western political thought made by the Hebrew Bible. Rauschenbusch's Hebraism, which deserves study, is found in remarks such as 'Both the Jewish and the American people were thereby equipped with a kind of ingrained, constitutional taste for democracy which dies hard' (ibid. 11). For the renewal of interest in 'political Hebraism', see the quarterly journal, *Hebraic Political Studies*, 1 (2005) and sequels.

⁶¹ Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 5.

⁶² Ibid. 6–7. ⁶³ Ibid. 8.

Rauschenbusch assays the content of prophetic preaching and action. It includes the criticism of disparities of wealth and of violations of rights, an advocacy of primitive democracy and social legislation, and a rejection of religion qua ritualism. Unfortunately, Rauschenbusch was not able to transcend the bias of Protestants of his day towards post-biblical Judaism; he sees the story of extra-canonical and rabbinic Judaism as one of decline. Personal religion supplanted social religion or, more precisely, the later prophets and their rabbinic successors 'turned their back on the Jewish nation and created the Jewish church'.⁶⁴ The political was folded into the ritual, ethical, and spiritual. But, while the social was transmuted into the individual, the prophetic concern, however translated into other idioms, was not fully expunged from Judaism, nor was it, despite centuries of battering, removed from Christianity. 'However individualistic religion became, it never abandoned the collective hope as the real consummation of religion'.⁶⁵ The personal concern for holiness remains tied to a public concern for social justice in both post-biblical Judaism and genuine Christianity.

For what did the prophets, followed by Jesus and the primitive church, hope? Rauschenbusch, no less than his critic, H. Richard Niebuhr, locates the radical hope of biblical faith in the realization of the Kingdom of God.⁶⁶ Rauschenbusch does not believe that the Kingdom can be brought by means of human striving alone—he is not as demythologized a liberal as his Jewish counterpart Hermann Cohen—but he does ascribe robust faith in human political activity to the prophets and Jesus. Politics becomes a significant, if not exclusive, locus of hope. Unlike later, neo-Orthodox critics such as the Niebuhr brothers, Rauschenbusch does not see striving towards the Kingdom of God in America as fatally misguided, irredeemably flawed, paralyzed by sin, or hubristic. He sees such struggle as continuous with the best tradition of the Hebrew Bible and of subsequent, prophetic Christianity. While more than an optimist or liberal—Rauschenbusch, like Cohen, is deeper than that—he is untouched by the bitter disillusionment of the First World War and the preoccupation with incorrigible sin of subsequent neo-Orthodoxy.

⁶⁴ Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 21.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 25.

⁶⁶ Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), 161–3; 183–4.

Rauschenbusch tolerates no easy elision of Jesus into a social critic or reformer of the modern type. Jesus remains the Son of God, whose ministry aimed at the total regeneration of life on every level. Universal prosperity, he points out, would not be incompatible with universal *ennui* and *Weltschmerz*.⁶⁷ Jesus promises more, but not less than social justice. A Jew working among Jews, he shared the great national hope for independence from Roman rule, righteousness in personal and social life, and the inauguration of the Kingdom of God among his people. Jesus' hope was a Jewish hope, but it also reached beyond the prejudices of his people: the Kingdom would not come after apocalyptic catastrophe; it would not be ushered in by violence. The experience of defeat, exile, and occupation narrowed the great prophetic hope for world regeneration into a narrower Jewish hope for political restoration. Jesus accepted that but restored the early collective hope to its glorious stature

The popular hope was all for a divine catastrophe. The kingdom of God was to come by a beneficent earthquake. Someday it would come like the blaze of a meteor, 'with outward observation', and they say: 'Lo, there it is!' (Luke 17: 20-1). We have seen that the prophetic hope had become catastrophic and apocalyptic when the capacity for political self-help was paralyzed. When the nation was pinned down helplessly by the crushing weight of the oppressors, it had to believe in a divine catastrophe that bore no causal relation to human action. The higher spiritual insight of Jesus reverted to the earlier and nobler prophetic view that the future was to grow out of the present by divine help.⁶⁸

The people awaited a dramatic end; Jesus worked patiently for organic renewal, cell by human cell, as it were. 'Thus Jesus worked on individuals and through individuals, but his real end was not individualistic, but social, and in his method he employed strong social forces'.⁶⁹ Jesus took the national hope of the Jews for a kingdom of righteous men and women, living under a godly polity, respecting one another's rights and dignity, and universalized it.

Rauschenbusch returns to the metaphor of 'organic growth' as a way, it appears, to bridge the gap between unassisted human effort and divine agency in the bringing of the Kingdom. His language is studiously vague.

⁶⁷ Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 41.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 49. ⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 50.

If the kingdom was not dependent on human force, nor divine catastrophe, but could grow quietly by organic processes; if it was not dependent on national reconstruction, but could work along from man to man, from group to group, creating a new life as it went along; then the kingdom in one sense was already here. Its consummation, of course, was in the future, but its fundamental realities were already present.⁷⁰

The fact that the kingdom is already in our midst (an old belief of American Protestantism—indeed, of Christianity, as such) validates the human effort to nurture its organic growth. The tension between divine and human agency has been relaxed. God initiated a process, the success of which is now in the hands of men. There is no inevitability here; the Kingdom will not progress by itself as a necessary development of a historical process. There is only possibility. The Kingdom can be brought by the application of human moral agency, by the imitation of the ethics of Jesus.

The ethic of Jesus is a social ethic; his ethics infuse familial, social, and political relations with love. The promotion of the Kingdom rests on the transfusion of social life through the practice of love. Remark—ing on the loving acts of Jesus in the Gospels, Rauschenbusch writes

All these acts and sayings receive their real meaning when we think of them in connection with the kingdom of God, the ideal human society to be established. Instead of a society resting on coercion, exploitation and inequality, Jesus desired to found a society resting on love, service, and equality. These new principles were so much the essence of his character and of his view of life, that he lived them out spontaneously and taught them in everything that he touched in conversations or public addresses. God is a father; men are neighbors and brothers; let them act accordingly. Let them love, and then life will be true and good. Let them seek the kingdom, and all things will follow. Under no circumstances let them suffer fellowship to be permanently disrupted. If an individual or class was outside of fraternal relations, he set himself to heal the breach. The kingdom of God is the true human society; *the ethics of Jesus taught the true social conduct which would create the true society*. This would be Christ's test for any custom, law or institution: does it draw men together or divide them.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 51. For a deepening of this view, see *ibid.* 52–3. Rauschenbusch's most probing critic, Reinhold Niebuhr, finds a very different meaning in the passages that use organic metaphors. He takes them to represent the 'capitulation of a great theologian and a great Christian soul to the regnant idea of progress' in his day. See Niebuhr, *Faith and Politics* (New York: George Braziller, 1968), 42. In fact, Rauschenbusch is in no way naive about progress nor is he casually optimistic. There is no inevitability about the coming of the Kingdom, there is only—at least on the side of humanity—possibility.

⁷¹ Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 57–8 (emphasis added).

The lesson of Jesus qua moral teacher then is social solidarity. Extremes of wealth and poverty disrupt social solidarity. Wealth per se is not evil but the concentration of it distorts 'normal and wholesome human relations'. Rauschenbusch wishes to endorse neither the wealth-denying abnegation of Christian asceticism nor the 'inner-worldly asceticism', to use Max Weber's phrase, of Calvinist and Puritan acquisition of goods and property as a sign of election. He verges, like Cohen, towards socialism. Indeed, Rauschenbusch often uses the word 'communism' to describe his ideal society, although apparently without hard reference to Marx and Engels. He wants both the prosperity that industrial capitalism generates and a community-wide sharing in its goods. He credits Jesus himself with this 'revolutionary' attitude: 'Ascetic Christianity called the world evil and left it. Humanity is waiting for a revolutionary Christianity which will call the world evil and change it.'⁷²

Was Rauschenbusch then a liberation theologian, *avant la lettre*? Yes and no. Like the liberation theologians of the late twentieth century, Rauschenbusch diagnoses the most malignant ills of modern society with the tools of political economy, led by a normative, essentially socialist conception of the relation between property and power. Although he does not endorse violent revolution in the communist manner, he sees political organizing, trades union, and other strategies and structures as integral to advancing justice and inaugurating the Kingdom. Thus, like the liberation theologians, Rauschenbusch underwrites an activist, politically engaged, hopeful faith: eschatology can be realized by directed human effort. Politics can actualize the Kingdom of God; politics offers an avenue for the expression of our deepest hopes. Unlike the liberation theologians, Rauschenbusch remains tied to an essentially missionary, evangelical strategy. He may endorse the workforce unionizing, strikes, and so on at the level of tactics, but at the more comprehensive level of strategy, the revolution that counts is the revolution of the human heart: *imitatio Christi*. Ultimately, Rauschenbusch sees the Kingdom growing and spreading because Christian love is transforming modern men and women, one soul at a time. A 'new apostolate' is necessary to implant love into our broken, imperiled society.

⁷² Ibid. 72.

The apostolate of a new age must do the work of the sower. When the sower goes forth to sow his seed, he goes with the certainty of partial failure and the knowledge that a long time of patience and of hazard will intervene before he can hope to see the result of his work and his venture. In sowing the truth a man may never see or trace the results. The more ideal his conceptions will be, and the farther they move ahead of his time, the larger will be the percentage of apparent failure. But he can afford to wait. The powers of life are on his side . . . The new life penetrates the old humanity and transforms it.⁷³

Although the organic metaphor implies the inevitability of growth, it also suggests risk and uncertainty. Rauschenbusch, although he does not seem to have as marked a sense of sin as his neo-Orthodox critics, affects a sober realism. 'In asking for faith in the possibility of a new social order', he writes, 'we ask for no Utopian delusion. We know well that there is no perfection for man in this life: there is only the growth towards perfection. . . We shall never have a perfect social life, yet we must seek it with faith'.⁷⁴ As in Cohen, 'at best there is always but an approximation to a perfect social order. The kingdom of God is always but coming'.⁷⁵

Faith, then, is that which sustains hope, for hope can never be fully realized in this life. Work for social justice, for the Kingdom, is an 'everlasting pilgrimage', valued for itself as well as for the approximations it achieves. Hope, like faith, is virtuous. Virtue imposes discipline on our dreams. In this, Rauschenbusch's traditional evangelical conviction restrains his modern progressivism. No matter how far we progress, really progress, towards the Kingdom

There will always be death and the empty chair and heart. There will always be the agony of love unreturned. Women will long for children and never press baby lips to their breast. Men will long for fame and miss it. Imperfect moral insight will work hurt in the best conceivable social order. The strong will always have the impulse to exert their strength, and no system can be devised which can keep them from crowding and jostling the weaker.⁷⁶

This evangelical, indeed, biblical reticence prevents Rauschenbusch from sliding into utopianism, from allowing the surge of 'hot hope . . . that perhaps the long and slow climb may be ending'⁷⁷ from overwhelming

⁷³ Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 57–8 (emphasis added), 334.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 337. ⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 338.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 337. ⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 338.

him. Yet, it is a delicate cord that tethers the Social Gospel to the hard ground of its Puritan and evangelical past, delicate and easily snapped by Rauschenbusch's modern acolytes. Rauschenbusch himself stretched it very far, perhaps too far. The closing lines of his book tip precariously away from his expressions of hard, evangelical realism towards a too-willing indulgence of 'hot hope'.

Last May a miracle happened. At the beginning of the week the fruit trees bore brown and greenish buds. At the end of the week they were robed in bridal garments of blossom. But for weeks and months the sap had been rising and distending the cells and maturing the tissues which were half ready in the fall before. The swift unfolding was the culmination of a long process. Perhaps these nineteen centuries of Christian influence have been a long preliminary stage of growth, and now the flower and fruit are almost here. If at this juncture we can rally sufficient religious faith and moral strength to snap the bonds of evil and turn the present unparalleled economic and intellectual resources of humanity to the harmonious development of a true social life, the generations yet unborn will mark this as that great day of the Lord for which the ages waited, and count us blessed for sharing the apostolate that proclaimed it.⁷⁸

It is perhaps easy to look back at Rauschenbusch with hindsight through the horrors of the twentieth century and see in his work a credulousness about what may be expected from the 'crooked timber' of humanity. The problem is not peculiar to him. As sharp an observer as he was of the deep social ills of his day, he retained a full-orbed faith in the special destiny of the United States, in its suitability to become a Christian nation, a harbinger of the Kingdom of God. Rauschenbusch was of a piece with Protestant aspiration going back to John Winthrop writing of a city on a hill on the deck of the *Arabella*. To the extent that one finds Rauschenbusch unacceptable now, it is less because of his individual features than because of the physiognomy he shares with generations of predecessors. The Protestant narrative of God's Kingdom in America collapsed shortly after Rauschenbusch's death. Nor have any of its successor narratives succeeded in organizing as durable a framework for sustaining hope in the American experiment. The next theologian whom we will consider works in the brown fields, as it were, of that abandoned industry of making America the Kingdom of God.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

Stanley Hauerwas: The Church as the Place of Hope

Hauerwas comes close to a Christian approximation of Franz Rosenzweig. Like Rosenzweig, he sets the community, in this case, the community of the Church, against the world of politics. Like Rosenzweig, he emphasizes liturgy—the formal traditional worship of God—as a constitutive way of enacting this sacred community. ‘The community of Jesus Christ’, he writes, ‘does not seek political power but rather to create a culture. It does so “simply, boldly and unapologetically” by being itself. That is why the liturgy is the church’s most decisive political act’.⁷⁹ Rosenzweig would not have put it this way in the case of the Jews; for him liturgy is an apolitical act. None the less, these thinkers share a conviction that their communities are set against the world, more or less aloof from the national contexts, projects, and aspirations in which Jews and Christians live. Jews for Rosenzweig and Christians for Hauerwas have ‘a better hope’ than the one tendered by politics.

Hauerwas’ statement that the liturgy is a political act suggests—and this is another point of difference from Rosenzweig—that the Church does render a service to the society or state in which Christians live. The ‘first task of the church is not to make the world more just but to make the world the world’.⁸⁰ Christians are not to construe their worship, their service, to their Lord through the pursuit of ‘social justice’ or through the practice of ‘social ethics’. The truthful worship of the Church should not blur the boundary between church and world but heighten it. By being a true community, the Church lets the world become conscious of itself as the world—fallen, sinful, and

⁷⁹ Stanley Hauerwas, *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy, and Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2000), 16. An analysis of Hauerwas’ work, as it bears on the political, may be found in the chapter on Hauerwas by R. R. Reno in Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (Malden: Blackwell, 2007), 302–15.

⁸⁰ Hauerwas, *A Better Hope*, 157. See also id., *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (South Bend, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1981), 74. Hauerwas’ early statement of this position is particularly blunt: ‘Christians must again understand that their first task is not to make the world better or more just . . . The first social task of the church is to provide the space and time necessary for developing skills of interpretation and discrimination sufficient to help us recognize the possibilities and limits of our society. In developing such skills, *the church and Christians must be uninvolved in the politics of our society and involved in the polity that is the church*’ (emphasis added).

hopeless without God. For 'without the church the world would have no way to understand what justice entails'.⁸¹ The Church, by narrating its story and praising its God does not, therefore, legitimate a withdrawal from caring about the world in a hermetic or sectarian manner. (Hauerwas seems incensed that his position is frequently mistaken for sectarian withdrawal.) It constitutes a genuine, if oblique, service to the world (the society, the state) by modelling true justice, true hope—indeed, for Hauerwas, a truthful understanding of reality.

The emphasis here is on the oblique. Throughout his work, Hauerwas has been concerned to disentangle Christian theology and ethics from a direct involvement with, to put it broadly, the American experiment. He criticizes both Walter Rauschenbusch and Rauschenbusch's most powerful critic Reinhold Niebuhr as taking for granted that Christianity must serve American democracy; that this is the essential work of the Church. Both social gossellers and Christian realists uncritically assumed that the American story is the meta-narrative into which the Christian story must be inserted, with appropriate modulation. But the 'story of America can tempt Christians to lose our own story and in the process fail to notice the god we worship is no longer the God of Israel'.⁸² Once the true worship of God is compromised, all is lost, including any indirect service that the Church might give to America. When

Christians in America take as their fundamental task to make America work, we lose our ability to survive as a church. We do so because in the interest of serving America the church unwittingly becomes governed by the story of America . . . That story is meant to make our God at home in America.⁸³

Hauerwas is deeply critical of theological enterprises that try to domesticate Christians, the Church, and the God of Israel to American narratives and norms. It is not that America is hateful or that Hauerwas is anti-American (although he occasionally sounds that way). It is rather that America exemplifies a liberal society and such a society is, in essential ways, pernicious. A liberal society, first, is amnesiac; it is

⁸¹ Hauerwas, *A Better Hope*, 157.

⁸² Ibid. 29. Although it is tempting stylistically to change Hauerwas' 'our' and 'we' to 'their' and 'they', I keep the original pronouns, as they are essential to his substantive point. Hauerwas writes in and for his community, not about abstractions such as 'Christianity' or 'Christian ethics'. For his critiques of Niebuhr and Rauschenbusch, see *ibid.* 96.

⁸³ Ibid. 33.

based on forgetting. Liberalism (Hauerwas means liberalism in its classic historical sense going back to Locke and other founders of the philosophical tradition) does not tell a story genuinely capable of truthfully revealing reality. It is a godless and bloodless story of supposed states of nature, of atomized individuals and universalized rights. It is no one's story and yet it pretends to be everyone's story; the ideal, normative story.⁸⁴ Liberalism for Hauerwas is based on a profound illusion, which can only be corrected by the clear light thrown from the Christian story of God made man, living the deepest and most human life in community with sinners, a victim of injustice, executed by a paradigmatic empire and, miraculously, raised from the dead. The Church in America, although it mouths the Christian story, speaks with the accents of the liberal one. That has become pervasive and deadly for the survival of a truth-telling church. Hauerwas advocates a marked Christian difference.

Liberalism—which is our common fate as moderns and Americans—is not only inimical to history and story, it is inimical to virtue. The liberal order is based on self-interest. In America it is articulated in a Constitution that assumes distrust of one another and of citizens towards the state. Madison's famous Federalist 10, with its argument for balancing faction against faction is the norm. Yet, for Hauerwas, echoing the pre-liberal aspiration of a virtuous politics, 'no just polity is possible without the people being just'.⁸⁵ The Church in America succumbed to the assumption that liberal norms—individual freedom, autonomy, consumer capitalism, and so on—were just. The Church, in its American captivity, forgot its own wisdom that a just polity—ideally, the Church itself—is based on trust, mutual love, sacrifice, and autonomy directed towards obedience to the Lord. Were the Church to reclaim its wisdom, its hallmark would be a 'refusal to resort to violence to secure its own existence or to insure internal obedience. For, as a community convinced of the truth, we refuse to trust any other power to compel than the truth itself'.⁸⁶

Hauerwas' strong critique of political liberalism is coordinate with a critique of economic liberalism. American liberalism has created an empty, illusionary life where freedom is directionless and consumerism

⁸⁴ Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 78, 84.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 73.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 85. See also *id.*, *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society* (South Bend, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1992), 117.

has become compulsive and parasitic on itself. Liberalism ironically claimed to make us free to pursue our own desires but it made us captive to our desires and bereft of a horizon beyond self-interested desire that could moderate and redeem our anomic lives. It is true that liberalism provides a marketplace for churches and other communities to display their alternative wares but these communities have been so deformed by liberalism that they form a distinction without a difference. He cites the difficult debate over homosexuality in the mainline churches as an example of the Church becoming captive to the root assumptions of a liberal society. Framing the debate over individual rights, liberty to pursue alternative lifestyles, and so on already forfeits whatever is distinctive of a Christian ethic. Thinking about marriage in conjunction with childbearing, about the status of singleness, about promiscuity—and not necessarily thinking about them in doctrinaire or simplistic ways—would anchor the problem in different kind of framework. Hauerwas' position is neither 'liberal' nor 'conservative' and thus, he laments, it is unintelligible to a church dominated by a liberal, capitalist culture.⁸⁷

What supports the assertion of the salience of a marked Christian difference is Hauerwas' emphasis on the role of narrative in constituting groups, world views, indeed, reality. Although he worshipped with Roman Catholics when he was a professor at the (Catholic) University of Notre Dame, he eschews the natural law tradition altogether. He does not think that we can arrive, through philosophical discovery or construction, at a shared foundation for civic life. Nor, more fundamentally, does he believe that we have a shared human nature that bears moral significance. We are irremediably divided into narrative communities, at least one of which is faithful to reality and one of which is fraudulent. When the American narrative masters other narratives, as has often happened with the Church and its theologians, this does not imply the discovery of a foundation so much as a successful political power-grab. There are no philosophically discoverable or demonstrable foundations outside the story of Jesus (the Jewish story of the God of Israel is grandfathered in) which offer a truthful representation of reality. When one takes on the story of Jesus and makes it one's own story, one comes to the fullest, deepest, and truest life possible. One casts off the liberal illusion that we were born

⁸⁷ Hauerwas, *A Better Hope*, 47–51.

to be happy. One accepts suffering. One commits oneself to work for a true community where love, not coercion, trust not dissimulation, service and sacrifice, rather than self-assertion and competition are the norms. One commits oneself, in family and community, to developing the virtues necessary to sustain the Church.

Philosophically, narrative-as-foundation is based, for Hauerwas, on a view of human nature: human nature is an artefact of history. That is, there is no history and community-independent nature that bear moral significance. The nature of humans is to be more than their biological nature.⁸⁸ Humans rise into communities and cultures and acquire virtues specific to their historical-communal contexts. Plato and Aristotle's attempt to specify the virtues that are appropriate to all true human beings turns out to be provincial. Even were we to agree that the virtue of courage, say, is universal in its scope we would still disagree as to what counts as courage in application. There is no way to avoid the historical specificity of virtue if moral evaluation is to have real content. There is no way then to disentangle virtue from the narratives that shape community, inform communal practice, and anchor the traditions that nurture identity and selfhood in a communal context. To put it more strongly, the capacity to be virtuous requires a community formed by a narrative, such as the Gospel, which is faithful to reality. There is no virtue in a narrative vacuum. If the Church is to survive and to perform its oblique service to the world, it must nurture its own community of virtue. The world cannot become the Kingdom, nor can the Church become the Kingdom. In the Church, however, the Christian can anticipate the Kingdom and cultivate virtues, such as patience and hope, with which the coming of Kingdom may be sensed.

Hauerwas, no less than Rauschenbusch or Moltmann, puts the concept of the Kingdom of God at the centre of his thought. Unlike others, however, he argues that in so far as the Kingdom is eschatological, and

⁸⁸ Id., *A Community of Character*, 123. This bit of reasoning nicely exemplifies Christine Korsgaard's argument that communitarian claims, such as Hauerwas makes, presuppose the very liberal universal claims someone like him wants to deny. When the communitarian asserts that human beings thrive best in the context of their historic, particular groups, he is making a general claim about the conditions of human flourishing, that is, he is identifying with what is universally true of humans. The moral force of the claim does not derive from its group specific status but from its universal validity. See Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 119.

thus to be brought about by God not man, we cannot know what it will be like. This is part of the fallacy, as he sees it, of extending current norms into the putative future Kingdom. We can toss off terms such as 'justice' or 'love' to describe the Kingdom but these are almost vaporous generalities. A Rauschenbusch sees the humanly inaugurated brotherhood of democratic man as the Kingdom, extending American ideals into God's eternity. But this is presumptuous. All we know of the Kingdom—and this is enough—is that it has already been inaugurated in Jesus. To live as true worshippers of God in Christ, to model the Kingdom in the midst of the admittedly very imperfect church, is to participate in (although not to advance) the Kingdom. This perspective frees the Christian from the anxieties and obsessions of others; it frees the Christian for the truest form of hope.

Others, for example Christian realists such as Reinhold Niebuhr, worried about defending democracy against Nazi and Soviet totalitarianism. In the last decades of the twentieth century, citizens worried about nuclear war and lined up for or against various versions of disarmament. One worries in the twenty-first century about Islamism and its will to power, or about catastrophic climate change and the end of civilization as we know it. For Hauerwas, all of these fear- and anxiety-driven concerns rest on the presumption that we are in charge of history and that it is our responsibility to make history turn out right. This is a presumption because 'history has already come out right'.⁸⁹ The decisive, central event of history was the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God confronted the powers and established his lordship over existence: the end has already arrived. Therefore, Christians need not fear the various apocalypses thrown up by the fevered secular imagination, all of which are based on covert and fallacious eschatologies. Christians have already seen the end; the Kingdom is among them in the Jesus worshipped in story, song, and proclamation.

Kant described the enlightened as those who set aside their self-imposed intellectual and moral immaturity. Hauerwas sees the Church as the virtuous remnant of those who set aside their anxieties about the world, who hope in the fulfilment of the Kingdom presaged in the life of the liturgical community. And yet, he insists, this is not withdrawal from or abandonment of the world. It is not Arendt's worldlessness. It is freedom from illusions, as well as, more positively, the responsibility

⁸⁹ Hauerwas, *Against the Nations*, 166.

to clarify for others outside of the Church what is really the case. Hauerwas is well known for his pacifism, a sterling example of living in the Kingdom in advance of its coming. Pacifism is not offered as a strategy for ending war, as an ethic that can be justified in consequentialist terms. It is a Christian duty, exemplary of the Christian virtue of forgiveness of enemies.

Christians are thus a peaceable people not because through such peace we can promise the ongoing existence of the world, but because we believe non-resistance is the way God has shown that he deals with the world and it is the way to which he therefore calls us to be faithful.⁹⁰

To take such a stance is to take a risk. The moral life is an adventure; to strive for excellence is necessarily to encounter opposition and difficulty. 'That is why an ethic of virtue always gains its intelligibility from narratives that place our lives within an adventure. For to be virtuous necessarily means we must take the risk of facing trouble and dangers that might otherwise be unrecognized'.⁹¹ Hope is required in order to sustain us in the belief that the adventure of a virtuous life is worth the risk. 'Hope thus forms every virtue, for without hope the virtuous cannot help but be ruled by despair'.⁹² Hope is thus critical to the arduousness of a moral life. So is patience. 'The hope necessary to initiate us into the adventure must be schooled by patience if the adventure is to be sustained. Through patience we learn to continue to hope even though our hope seems to offer little chance of fulfilment'.⁹³ Patient hope expects that our 'moral projects' will prevail and gives us the strength to endure.

Where then do the virtues of hope and patience come from? Most eminently they come from the narrative communities of the Church and, it seems, the synagogue.

Without denying that there may be non-religious accounts of hope and patience, Jews and Christians have been the people that have stressed the particular importance of these virtues. For they are the people formed by the conviction that our existence is bounded by a power that is good and faithful. Moreover they are peoples with a deep stake in history; they believe God has charged them with the task of witnessing to his providential care of our

⁹⁰ Hauerwas, *Against the Nations*, 166.

⁹¹ Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 115.

⁹² *Ibid.* 127.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

existence. They believe that their history is nothing less than the story of God's salvation of them and all people.⁹⁴

Jews and Christians are thus hopeful aliens in the liberal society. They derive great moral strength and vision from their truthful stories. Their lives are shaped by an ultimate hope. But they, or at least the Christians—Hauerwas should not be pressed to speak for the Jews—must carefully demarcate the 'garden of the church', as Roger Williams put it, from the wilderness of the world.

Hauerwas' continual characterization of Christians as a people does more than gesture inclusively or ecumenically towards the Jews. It analogizes the Church to the Jewish people. It assumes a kindred ecclesiology. If this is the case, then Hauerwas exposes himself to the same criticism we directed towards Rosenzweig. The Jews survived as a people, from a historical point of view, through their political wits not through their apolitical worldlessness. Had Jewish communities not been competent to navigate the political waters of many times and places, they would not have survived. If the Church is properly a minority people in a world either indifferent or hostile to its story, virtues, and norms then it ought not to be aloof from politics if it hopes to survive. It needs to follow the Jews into an appropriate balance of engagement and distance, awareness and aloofness. The attitude of insularity that Rosenzweig and Hauerwas commend is understandable, especially when sacred traditions, which are at once among the most durable and fragile things, are at stake. There is even nobility here. The antiquity of both the Jews and the Church readily implies that they have seen it all before. The powers and principalities of this world, Babylon and Rome, all pass away but these things remain. One can understand such an attitude. But these very traditions commit one to hope in this world as well. They commit Jews and Christians to be in covenant with God and covenant means to exercise responsibility with God for the domain in which we are placed. To say that 'history has already come out right' scants the covenantal role of God's people; it diminishes their legitimate responsibility for making history right. Hauerwas' stance seems, in the end, more radical than serious, more critical than responsible. Such a responsibility is assumed, with all due qualification, in the thought of Jürgen Moltmann.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 128.

Jürgen Moltmann: A Political Theology of Hope

Moltmann's thought represents a sustained attempt to restore eschatology—the doctrine of the last things—to a central place in Christian theology and praxis. The tradition has often fashioned eschatology as a marginal, highly notional department of theology, a species of apocalyptic. Furthermore, the moral dimension of eschatology—a messianically oriented political or social activism—has been consigned to fanatical groups, such as the radical Anabaptist sectarians who tried to establish a theocracy in Münster during the Reformation. Moltmann's first major book, *Theology of Hope*, argues on behalf of the constitutive centrality of eschatology for Christianity as a whole. The hope in God, engendered by what God has done in the resurrection of Christ, should orient all of life, thought, and work in the world. The hope for the fulfilment of God's promises in the coming of his kingdom motivates Christians to affirm political life as a framework for advancing the cause of the kingdom. Political engagement alone, however, is never sufficient for the achievement of the kingdom; that achievement remains God's. Moltmann, although he endorses political engagement in a broad and deep way, never collapses the independent agency of God into an anthropological framework.⁹⁵

In classical times, Christianity banished its future hope into the timelessness of eternity; it de-historicized hope for the future. To conceive of eschatology properly is to restore Christian hope for history to the prominence and centrality that it deserves. 'From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue,' Moltmann writes, 'Christianity *is* eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present'. He continues:

The eschatological is not one element of Christianity, but it is the medium of Christian faith as such, the key in which everything in it is set, the glow that suffuses everything here in the dawn of an expected new day. For Christian faith lives from the raising of the crucified Christ, and strains after the promises of the universal future of Christ. Eschatology is the passionate suffering and

⁹⁵ For a helpful overview of Moltmann's political theology, see the article on Moltmann by Nicholas Adams in Scott and Cavanaugh, *Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, 230.

passionate longing kindled by the Messiah. Hence eschatology cannot really be only a part of Christian doctrine. Rather, the eschatological outlook is characteristic of all Christian proclamation, of every Christian existence and of the whole Church. *There is therefore only one real problem in Christian theology, which its own object forces upon it and which it in turn forces on mankind and on human thought: the problem of the future.*⁹⁶

What then is the future? Moltmann conceives of the future in a manner heavily influenced by Bloch, but also by Paul. The future is *novum ultimum*, that which is ultimately new, unprecedented, unknown, and unknowable. The future is a ‘*totum* of Utopia’, a fullness of perfection that outstrips any conceivable utopian images that we have heretofore generated.⁹⁷ There can be no doctrine of the future, no eschatology in a formal, scholastic sense, as the future has no logos. It is by definition unsettled and unknown, redolent with possibility that cannot be reduced to what we think under current circumstances is possible. This is very much Bloch’s view. The concept of the future is inexhaustibly rich, forever outstripping our need to capture it in ideas and images. But that extra-categorical quality of the future is also mooted by the New Testament, as Paul wrote ‘For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope’ (Rom. 8: 24). Hope, which orients us towards the future, does not anticipate that which is already seen and known but that which has never been seen and cannot yet be known. The future is always coming and always comes in the guise of the radically new. The hopeful promises of God ‘do not seek to illuminate the reality which exists, but the reality which is coming. They do not seek to make a mental picture of existing reality, but to lead existing reality towards the promised and hoped-for transformation’.⁹⁸

For Bloch, as we have seen, the future functions as a transcendental, regulative ideal categorically distinct from any actual state of affairs. I argued that this view is incoherent in so far as Bloch imports known values, such as justice, into his allegedly unknowable future Utopia.

⁹⁶ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, trans. James W. Leitch (London: SCM Press, 1967), 16 (emphasis added). See also Moltmann, *In the End—The Beginning: The Life of Hope*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2004), 87–8.

⁹⁷ See Moltmann’s critical (and appreciative) study of Bloch in Moltmann, *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics*, trans. M. Douglas Meeks (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1984), 173–87.

⁹⁸ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 18.

Moltmann wants to preserve the open possibility of the future but he also, as a Christian, wants to identify that future with the coming of a God whom Christians already know, believe, and serve.

Christian hope doesn't talk about the future per se and all by itself, as an empty end towards which possible changes steer. It starts from a particular historical reality, and announces the future of that reality, its power over the future, and its consummation. The Christian doctrine of hope talks about *Jesus Christ and his future*. It is only in his name that hope is Christian.⁹⁹

The future, as Christians should imagine it, is illumined by remembrance of the past. The triumph of God over injustice, oppression, death, and sin at the exodus and at the empty tomb is a harbinger of what the consummation of history will be like. The same tension that we have seen in Bloch thus replicates itself in Moltmann. He rejects philosophical views (e.g., Parmenides) and theological views (e.g., Kierkegaard) that extend the character of the present into an eternal future; he rejects mystical and existential absorption into the *nunc stans*. The future will be radically unlike the present. We may speak in the present of Christ as 'Son of God, Son of man, Lord, Saviour, Redeemer', but we cannot know fully what these titles mean until the future consummation. God-talk, to use the rather pallid philosophical expression, expresses expectation; it does not describe the known realities of the present.

It is because a Christian already knows something of salvation that the future qua new creation is not entirely new. Moltmann emphasizes the trope of the entirely or radically new as a critical device, in my judgement, more than as a description. As a critical device, radical novelty is meant to provide a ground to criticize the formation of utopian visions, whether Christian or secular, that exclude God's agency and stem from the human imagination and, correlatively, from human activity alone. The great hope that Christians hold for the world as the place of God's coming kingdom gives direction to all of the personal hopes of individuals and for the purely immanent expressions of social hope but it judges them as well:

It will destroy the presumption in these hopes of better human freedom, of successful life, of justice and dignity for our fellow men, of control of the possibilities of nature, because it does not find in these movements the

⁹⁹ Id., *In the End—The Beginning*, 88.

salvation that awaits, because it refuses to let the entertaining and realizing of utopian ideas of this kind reconcile it with existence. It will thus outstrip these future visions of a better, more humane, more peaceable world—because of its own ‘better promises’ (Heb. 8: 6), because it knows that nothing can be ‘very good’ until ‘all things are become new’.¹⁰⁰

Eschatological orientation brings with it powerful consequences for attitudes, morals, and politics. To live in hope is to be discontent with the present, to know that the advent of God in the divine kingdom of the future relativizes and judges every present. Hope inspires ‘ferment in our thinking. . . restlessness and torment’. As he puts it with great drama, ‘the goad of the promised future stabs inexorably into the flesh of every unfulfilled present’.¹⁰¹ Is fulfilment then primarily effectuated through human engagement with the political sphere, as in Rauschenbusch, or is it the business of the Church to be Church and to impact the world obliquely, as in Hauerwas? How frontal should the Christian engagement with politics be? To what extent should the great eschatological hope empty itself into our provisional social hopes for a more just world? Moltmann licenses an intensive engagement with politics in the framework of a supranational, human-rights oriented activism while preserving a sense of the limits of such engagement.

The political dimension of Moltmann’s thought is pervasive. There are Christian theologies, he tells us, that are conscious of their own political function, as well as Christian theologies that are naive about this ‘but there is no apolitical theology’.¹⁰² The political implications, entanglements, presuppositions, and implications of theology must be ‘awakened’.¹⁰³ Lutheran theology would preserve the institutions of the secular order as God’s ordinances and seek to exercise love within them. Reformed Protestantism, no less than Luther, rejected the idea that the Kingdom of God could be realized on earth through human agency. This tradition, however, licensed greater engagement in politics as a vehicle for discipleship. It rediscovered the biblical idea of covenant as a basis for constituting a political society directed to godly purposes. Christians are to take upon themselves an undivided responsibility for shaping all areas of life including ‘the state, law and economic system’.¹⁰⁴ Following Karl Barth, upon whom Moltmann builds, all of reality is now under the lordship of Christ. The Church

¹⁰⁰ Id., *Theology of Hope*, 34.

¹⁰² Id., *On Human Dignity*, 99.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 21.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 86.

is that community that best models life under this lordship to the state. Although the state can never be brought to perfection, it can always be subject to improvement. Thus, Christians should move towards a political calling to bring the justice of the state into an at least analogous relationship to the justice of God. (The state, which as a part of reality is also under the lordship of Christ, is neither identical with nor different from, the kingdom of God proclaimed by the Church. This ambiguous relationship can be described as an analogy or parable.)¹⁰⁵

Moltmann draws from the Reformed tradition but seeks to go beyond it. Given his eschatological orientation, the lordship of Christ should not be construed as a historical fact, so to speak, but as a coming future. A too certain conviction of Christ's victory should give way to the certainty of Christian hope.¹⁰⁶ Moltmann fears that ancient proclamations of an already accomplished Kingdom, fully real but merely waiting to be made manifest among us, could underwrite a theocracy, scant the genuine suffering of men and women in history, and impoverish the openness of the future. Christian claims have validity only in so far as they are *made* valid. The Christian can only *have* the truth by 'confidently *waiting* for it and wholeheartedly *seeking* it'.¹⁰⁷ Thus, taking hope seriously steers us away from static convictions and towards forms of activity, of dynamic anticipation, of anticipation that nourishes action. In keeping with his emphasis on the orienting function of hope, Moltmann proposes a 'political' or 'messianic hermeneutic'. Rather than take history, with its central event of Christ's death and resurrection, as the basis of a kind of certainty that could underwrite either political triumphalism or sectarian quietism, history must be read as the history of hope. History is the history of God's promises, still unfulfilled, pointed towards his future advent, fueling our expectations. History read scientifically and with a prophetic attention to 'the power of the future' invites our participation. The remembrance of past divine liberation funds emancipatory action in hopeful anticipation of the coming future.

This hermeneutic is thoroughly critical. It is critical of a theology that would prescind from political praxis but it is also critical of action that tries to divorce itself from theology.

¹⁰⁵ Id., *On Human Dignity*, 88–9.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 94. ¹⁰⁷ Id., *Theology of Hope*, 326.

[W]ithout cooperation with the kingdom of God, one cannot understand the Bible. And without understanding the Bible one cannot . . . cooperate with the kingdom of God in the world . . . Political hermeneutic is experienced in Christian passion and action. In political activity and suffering one begins to read the Bible with the eyes of the poor, the oppressed, and the guilty—and to understand it. Such a theology ‘does not stop with reflecting on the world, but rather tries to be part of the process through which the world is transformed. It is a theology which is open . . . to the gift of the kingdom of God’.¹⁰⁸

The mutual incorporation of theory and practice, in the restless spirit of constant ferment, pushes the Christian towards new possibilities of action on behalf of the coming kingdom of God and also allows for criticism of such action. Whatever humans do will not suffice to bring the kingdom; the sin of presumption hangs over our works and must be defused by critical theory read out of the Bible by way of political hermeneutics. This world is not yet the kingdom but ‘it is the battleground and construction site for kingdom, which comes on earth from God himself’.¹⁰⁹

Moltmann’s explicitly political work is full of concrete goals on which Christians should work and which, presumably, Christians should hope to achieve or at least to approximate. These goals, one has to admit, fall solidly on what is normally taken to be the political left. Prior to the fall of the USSR, Moltmann exhibited a tendency towards the German ‘Sonderweg’, the special path between East and West. A critic of both capitalism and socialism, he was engaged in the theological dialogue with Marxism. Today, his focus is on the inequities of global capitalism. One senses that his project of political theology, careful as it is on the theoretical level to distinguish between human agency on behalf of the kingdom of God and the divine consummation of the kingdom, endorses a certain leftist politics too heartily on the practical level. None the less, the theoretical distinction he draws should be taken as his canonical view. In a recent work, he writes:

¹⁰⁸ Id., *On Human Dignity*, 107. The citation in the original is from Gustavo Gutierrez. Moltmann elsewhere defends his and other European/North American expressions of political theology against criticisms of Gutierrez and others that such projects lack seriousness outside of a Third World context. See id., *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1999), 46–70.

¹⁰⁹ Id., *On Human Dignity*, 109.

In the history of this still unredeemed world, Christians will not aim to bring about the kingdom of God. God will do that himself. But they will press for parables and correspondences to God's righteousness and justice and his kingdom, and insist that circumstances that are in contradiction to them are diminished. . . . Because Christians know that they have the rights of citizenship in the coming kingdom (*politeuma*, Phil. 3: 20), they will do what is best in the kingdom of the world in which they live, and will contribute their ideas about justice and freedom to their political community. Because of their hope, they cannot escape into absentee democracy but will be present wherever political ways out of the perils have to be sought. In these perils of the world they can show where deliverance is to be found.¹¹⁰

Neither identified too closely with any prevailing political order, nor withdrawn into an escapist community of the saved, Christians should 'be present' in working to diminish the perils of the world through political means. They must also be present for others to point beyond the perils to the kingdom that hope anticipates, works for, and in some sense knows is coming.

Catholicism on Hope and Politics: The Church in the Modern World

Protestantism was one of the progenitors of the modern world. The Reformation disrupted the declining medieval order and catalyzed those factors that led to its end. The Catholic Church tried for several centuries to retain as much of the medieval order as could be salvaged. It resisted, in its official quarters at least, the development of liberal culture—of rights-based democracy, social pluralism, separation of church and state, and freedom of religion. It resisted the democratic age. In the 1930s, H. Richard Niebuhr classified Catholicism as committed to the 'Christ of culture', that is, an accommodation with culture rather than an opposition towards or retreat from it. The culture, however, was the medieval one; the Roman Church was 'animated by a desire to return to the culture of the thirteenth [century]'.¹¹¹ All of this was to change dramatically with the Second

¹¹⁰ Id., 'Progress and Abyss: Remembrances of the Future of the Modern World', in Miroslav Volf and William Katerberg (eds.), *The Future of Hope: Christian Tradition amid Modernity and Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004), 22–3.

¹¹¹ Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 102.

Vatican Council of 1962–5. One of the great documents of that universal meeting of the bishops of the Catholic Church is *Gaudium et Spes* (*Joy and Hope*), also known as the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. This text articulates the relationship of the Church *ad extra*, that is, to the world beyond itself. It is a great theological essay on the cultural, political, economic, moral, and spiritual condition of modern humanity and on how Christians are duty-bound to engage it. As such, it offers an authoritative statement on the problem of the relation between hope and politics.

In terms of the typology I developed above, the view falls between a robust investment of hope in politics (theological–political optimism) and a sober recollection that all human projects are tainted by sin and therefore worthy of real, if restrained hope (theological–political realism). If anything, however, the document leans more towards the former than the latter stance. Its guiding spirit is rather more Aquinas than Augustine.

Gaudium et Spes is named for the first words of its text: ‘the joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ (1).’¹¹² The Council Fathers make it clear at the very start that the Church does not want to stand aloof from the world. Its duty is to be engaged with the persons, societies, and systems of its age as Jesus was engaged with his world. The Church must read the ‘signs of the times’ (4) and respond to them with love. The analysis that follows reflects on the ‘profoundly changed conditions’ that constitute the modern world, speaking movingly of the gains but also of the vast suffering that the past several centuries have effectuated. The increase in human power unleashed by science and technology, as well as the expanded human desire for political and economic participation (73), have led to a paradoxical situation where ‘the modern world shows itself at once both powerful and weak’ (9). What are the limits of human agency in such a world? For what may persons hope? Modern man ‘is becoming aware that it is his responsibility to guide aright the forces which he has unleashed and which can enslave him or minister to him’ (9). With this paradoxical

¹¹² Since the English text is standardized in all editions, reference will be, in line, to the articles or numbered paragraphs of the Constitution. For the complete text, see Walter M. Abbott (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966).

estimate of the contemporary *conditio humana*, the document sets out to balance hope for a humane social, cultural, economic, and political order with hope for a world beyond this order.

Made in God's image, human beings have dignity and a divine destiny. Sin, however, has damaged humanity's intrinsic holiness, so much so that 'man finds that by himself he is incapable of battling the assaults of evil successfully, so that everyone feels as though he is bound by chains' (13). The document, as a text of orthodox faith, cannot help but to bring up the problem of sin on many occasions. That said, however, the dominant tack of the text is to stress human dignity, conscience, agency, duty, and possibility. Christ has freed all persons, whether Christian or not, for service to the common good. There is a theological-political optimism in the text that would put it rather on the far side of what a neo-Orthodox Protestant pessimist such as Reinhold Niebuhr would find defensible. With its classic belief in natural law, the Church can affirm that 'In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience... For man has in his heart a law written by God' (16). Conscience can err, but human dignity remains impeccable. This anthropology underwrites political liberty, rights, moral agency, and accountability.

Human beings are capable of doing good; they are capable of discerning the common good and of subordinating their individual interest in favour of it. The common good is 'the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment' (26). The common good is comprised by all those things making for a truly human life, including

food, clothing, and shelter: the right to choose a state of life freely and to found a family, the right to education, to employment, to a good reputation, to respect, to appropriate information, to activity in accord with the upright norm of one's own conscience, to protection of privacy and to rightful freedom in matters religious too (26).

The document envisions human beings as called to pursue their own good as moderated by the common good, discerned by conscience, and assented to by free will. True, both individuals and the social structures in which they are caught up are sometimes so 'contaminated' by pride and selfishness that they are not able to accomplish this

moderation. Then, the 'assistance of grace' is necessary (25). None the less, human beings as they are can go a long way towards realizing a humane society on the basis of their own moral initiative. Consenting to modern pluralism, the Church, ascribes 'rightful independence' to earthly affairs: science, technology, politics, and so on must be allowed to unfold in accord with their own inherent principles. Pluralism and independence accord with the God-given dignity of the human. However, thoughtful people must continually trace human agency back to its ultimate dependence on God. To sever the connection between the lifeworlds governed by *ratio* with a deep, underlying *fides* is to consign *ratio* to unintelligibility and action to sin. Once again, the emphasis is on a voluntary recognition of proper balance and underlying order.

This perspective is carried over to the engagement with politics as such. The first principle of politics, as Richard Neuhaus has said, is that politics is not the first principle. The text's own way of putting this is 'Earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ's kingdom' (39). This criterion would definitely distinguish the Catholic project from that of the Protestant Social Gospel were it consistently applied. The text quickly notes, however, that 'nevertheless to the extent that [earthly progress] can contribute to the better ordering of human society, it is of vital concern to the kingdom of God' (39). Human effort on behalf of the common good and 'earthly progress' is not identical with but of concern to the kingdom of God. The document envisions a cooperative relationship between the City of Man and the City of God. Christians must know that their true destiny is to belong to the heavenly City while their true vocation is to work in the midst of the other (43).

Let all Christians appreciate their special and personal vocation in the political community. This vocation requires that they give conspicuous example of devotion to the sense of duty and of service to the advancement of the common good. Thus they can also show in practice how authority is to be harmonized with freedom, personal initiative with consideration for the bonds uniting the whole social body, and necessary unity with beneficial diversity (74)

The document does not stipulate what form of government is best; it grants that different arrangements will suit different nations. All arrangements, however, must conform to moral norms. The Christian is

to be a witness to that moral exigency. The document envisions the full participation of Catholics *qua* citizens in the 'earthly progress' towards the common good, as well as the witness, criticism, love, and ministry of Catholics *qua* Christians to the political realm. In the extreme case, where a tyranny violates fundamental rights and oppresses people 'it is lawful for them [i.e. the oppressed people] to defend their own rights and those of their fellow citizens against any abuse of this authority, provided that in so doing they observe the limits imposed by natural law and the gospel' (74). Thus, the document envisions a right of revolution against tyranny but only to a point: in situations of conflict just war criteria need to come into play.

In answer then to the question, for what may one hope out of politics from a Catholic point of view, one may hope for a great deal. The progress of the earthly city should not be confused with the coming of the City of God, but that there has been progress in the former and that one has a right to expect more of it and a duty to work to realize it is clear. In so far as ought implies can, the Church foresees a realistic possibility of achieving a more just, equitable, dignified, and humane world as a result of human political agency, although it will surely be long in coming (29). But, that it will come implies both opportunity and duty. The possibility of a world fit for God's creatures orients human vocation and animates human hope. Hope in this world through the means of a moral politics works in tandem with hope for eternal life at the end of time (21). If either of these conjoint hopes are wanting, then 'the riddles of life and death, of guilt and of grief go unsolved, with the frequent result that men succumb to despair' (21). Despair is a vice, the vicious inverse of the virtue of hope.

These sketches of representative figures and texts from twentieth-century theology depict abiding possibilities for the relation between politics and hope. Although persons who place hope in the politics of our democratic age—or who refrain from doing so—seldom invoke explicit theological justification, if pressed to pursue the arguments implicit in their convictions they would come to positions such as these. The theologically optimistic view may yet be found in the liberal Protestant successors to the original Social Gospel movement. It may be found among Jews who view the State of Israel as the 'first flower of our redemption'. It may also be found, more ominously, among theocrats, millenarians, and—contested term—'fundamentalists' of many stripes. There are many who are convinced that political

agency can eventuate in a godly future, whether an eschatological consummation of history or a divinely approved regime. Such hopes fuel the violent fantasies of jihadists, who think that they can achieve a universal Caliphate through terror and war. Such hopes were found in secularized political theologies of totalitarians, who thought that politics was the sanctified medium for the achievement of their unholy kingdoms. None the less, the optimistic view today seems driven more by naivety than malice.

The theologically pessimistic view endures as well. The eruption of political hope and passion on the Religious Right in the 1970s soon experienced a backlash. Some Protestant fundamentalists gave up on the millennial dream of a righteous, Christian America and retreated to a hands-off, disillusioned stance towards politics. Ultra-Orthodox Jews, to an extent, hold to such a position. They are sometimes indifferent citizens, willing to exercise political clout when their own communal issues are at stake, but unwilling to care about the polity as a whole, as citizens should. They do not identify with it, either in the US or in Israel; they know that their ultimate destiny lies elsewhere and they are people for whom ultimate destiny is a daily business. They have effectively suspended any political hope until the messiah comes and makes things right. The many Americans who do not vote and who do not care about public issues may well have given up any hope for meaning in political life. They do not explain their isolation from the political by means of such theological principles as Rosenzweig or Hauerwas have adduced. None the less, while the views of such apolitical persons are probably not deep, the problem of the abandonment of hope in politics is deep. Theology might yet clarify (and correct) it.

Moderation in hope is the best course. Although the particular theologies of Buber and Moltmann may not be compelling, the stance that they assume has worth. Politics, in a democratic age, is a field of responsibility, not of salvation. One must take it seriously to the extent that one must take God's world seriously; that is required by a covenantal faith. It is a virtue for a democratic citizen to hope and one ought to pursue the virtues. None the less, one should be clear about how much and how little is possible for this field. To the extent that one can analyse such a problem in an abstract way, we attempt to do so in the Conclusion.

Conclusion: Towards a Politics of Hope

'Liberty is the last, best hope of earth'.

Abraham Lincoln

As the quote from Lincoln implies, politics is implicated in the highest of our worldly hopes. Liberty is a political good and is achieved and sustained by political action. Much of our hope, especially in a democratic age, looks to the political sphere for its fulfilment. What then may we hope for from politics, more precisely, from democracy, the politics that best represents our highest values?

The question 'what may we hope for?' seems infinitely open-ended. Surely, there are many things for which an individual or a people may hope. When Kant asked the question—at the end of the *Critique of Pure Reason*—he indicated that it invited both a theoretical and a practical response, that is, that the question presupposed both purely conceptual and empirical interests. In line with Kant's insight, let us consider the question of hope and politics conceptually and empirically as a matter of logic and of experience.

One conceptual approach to the question, which seems to know the answer in advance of any empirical investigation of what politics actually achieves, is the confident Christian conviction that politics, as a work of man, is irremediably flawed by sin. Reinhold Niebuhr gave this dogmatic conviction an ironic twist when he said that the doctrine of original sin is the one *empirically* verifiable doctrine of Christian faith.¹ But this is

¹ Robert McAfee Brown (ed.), *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986), p. xii. A similar doctrinal confidence is found in Glenn Tinder, *The Fabric of Hope: An Essay* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1999), 13–29; for Tinder, modern hope is a categorical failure due to human sin.

not the case. To identify a misdeed as a sin is ineluctably a matter of interpretation. Neither nature nor history wears its meaning on its face. To identify a human condition, propensity, trait, or persistent outcome as evidence of sin is to read a set of events in a certain way. The events underdetermine the reading. Doctrines are made, not found. Different readers will read the same events in different ways. A Christian such as Niebuhr may find in the often vicious follies of political life undeniable evidence of original sin, of the radical evil instinct in the human heart. A secular progressive will find the lingering defects of a bad education, upbringing, or social circumstance. A religious Jew, like a religious Christian, may have a stony realism about the evil instinct concomitant with human striving but will differ with the Christian about its source, status, or ineradicability.² From a Jewish point of view, Niebuhrian pessimism about the inevitable immorality of politics, based on the doctrine of original sin, may feel a bit too doctrinaire. Granted that our ultimate hope will always transcend and condition our proximate hopes for the societies in which we live, but the question of what we may hope for from social and political life remains essentially open. What hope shall we invest in the democratic age, in the liberal society? How shall we find a plausible balance that succumbs neither to cynicism nor to optimism, both of which arrest a rational exploration of our possibilities?

As to the purely conceptual or 'logical' features of hope, let us consider what is entailed when hope is framed as an emotion vis-à-vis when it is taken as a virtue. When hope is no more than an emotion, the range of what we hope for is vast. The sky, if that, is the limit. Hope, like wishing, can fix on almost anything. Yet, even here hope is not entirely undisciplined. It is loosely tied to a rational sense of what is possible. It is not, strictly speaking, the same as mere wishful thinking or fantasy; one cannot hope for that which is impossible, at least within reason. None the less, it is not as far from fantasy as a sober estimation of possibility would require. This can have dreadful consequences when hope as mere emotion turns to politics. It pretends to an anchorage in the world of affairs that it does not quite deserve. Visions of wishful, passionate hope gain their traction in relation to real

² See B. Berachot 17a, where the inherent human impulse towards evil is likened to yeast in dough, without which rising (i.e., productive, transformative activity) cannot take place. For the biblical roots of Jewish conceptions of evil that do not warrant, as Judaism has seen it, the interpretation of original sin, see Israel Knohl, *The Divine Symphony: The Bible's Many Voices* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Jewish Publication Society, 2003), 40.

problems but outstrip the abilities of their adherents to solve them. They misjudge the political, indeed, the human condition in which the problems are to be addressed. The end is usually terror. Hundreds of thousands of kulaks do not want to give up their private property for the sake of the hope for a classless society. Millions of Chinese do not want to be culturally re-educated. Reckless political hope is impatient with the 'crooked timber of humanity' and insists that it be made straight here and now.

Fantastic hope cannot be an ally of democracy. The inflation of hope when invested in something as complex and clumsy as the machinery of a modern government can only lead to disappointment, which in turn leads either to apolitical withdrawal or hyper-political fanaticism. Either way, the possibilities and responsibilities of citizenship are lost. Democracy cannot survive without hope but neither can it survive by stimulating hopes beyond its capacity to fulfil them.³ There is danger on either side. When such idols of modern hope as revolution, progress, or nationalism crumble, more terrifying idols can take their place. The colonized Muslim societies of the Middle East, for example, were given a glimpse of Western modernity by their French and British overlords. Stirrings of modern hope for reform of society, institutions, and religion entered their cultures. These did not have time to take root, however. After the colonial powers withdrew, new autocracies, fuelled by modern hopes for power, prosperity, and control arose, born aloft by new ideologies such as socialism and pan-Arabism. The failure of these dreams gave birth to more audacious and virulent dreams. Instead of dictatorships whose only competence is staying in power, the radical dreamers of the Muslim world dream of a holy empire, a Caliphate, stretching from Spain to Indonesia. A political-theological hope of the most audacious kind funds the terror of jihad, as it had earlier funded the intemperate hopes of Western totalitarians.⁴ Impatience with the slow, continuing struggle for reform, with incremental improvement, often aggravated by economic and political crises dooms sober hope. Passionate hope when it recognizes no limit and grows fanatical is a malign political force.

³ A sobering account of the dysfunction of modern democratic government, and its increasing inability to justify whatever hope we invest in it, may be found in Jonathan Rauch, *Government's End: Why Washington Stopped Working* (New York: Public Affairs, 1999), 152, 163.

⁴ For an argument on behalf of the European-totalitarian ancestry of Islamism, see Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberalism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003).

So, too, is the loss of hope. A democratic republic by definition requires citizens who care about civic and political life. Citizens, unlike subjects, as Aristotle observed, must both rule and be ruled. They must be engaged. They must be willing to put aside the worthy projects of their private lives to work for or sacrifice for the common good. Democratic citizens will differ, of course, on when that time comes or what the measure of that common good or the sacrifice for it is. Democratic republics can be thick or thin, incubators for patriotism or frameworks for commerce. But they all make some justified claims on the loyalty of their citizens. The point remains; citizens, to be true to their vocation, must rise to some level of civic and political engagement. Otherwise, a democratic republic collapses into a less than democratic constitutional form.

To be engaged, to exert agency on behalf of civil and political society, assumes that there is some hope for a successful outcome or, at least, for the possibility of a successful outcome. If citizens did not think that they had at least a fighting chance, say, of removing a toxic waste dump from their neighbourhood or saving a historic building from the wrecking ball, or improving the performance of students in their school district, they would not act. An infinity of moderate hopes for small but real changes drives the engagement of citizens in a common life. Were such hopes always disappointed, collective agency would wither. Sometimes action does succeed. It is not always the case that doing, *pace* Michael Oakeshott, is deadly and that contemplation is our only, final joy.⁵ Political liberty too has a claim on being the 'last, best hope of earth'.

Yet, doing typically entails unforeseen consequences. Good intentions pave many a road to hell. The most ambitious projects well-meaning democratic governments have mounted have often set some stones in place on the road to serfdom. Rent control, social security, welfare, public housing—all benevolent imports from Europe, as they played out over the last century, brought measures of harm along with measures of help. Stabilizing housing costs for some drove them up for many. Helping indigent persons and families created a whole culture of dependency and social dysfunction, the undoing of which requires painful, even hateful shocks. Massive new housing projects rose on

⁵ Michael Oakeshott, 'The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind', *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Liberty Fund, 1991), 540.

deteriorated urban neighbourhoods but became far more dangerous and desperate than the neighbourhoods they replaced. Indeed, the destruction of those projects and the resettlement of their residents to other areas, far from solving the problem of deep poverty and crime, continues to exacerbate it.⁶ Despite good will, doing often is deadly. But, not doing can be irresponsible. Not doing implies failing to hope, a resigned withdrawal from the world. There may be some circumstances when resignation is justified, but in democratic societies, where citizens have the right and responsibility to associate freely and work for the common good, resignation and withdrawal should be a last resort. Such societies are predicated on the protection of privacy, but private life, while a very great good, must not be thought the only good. To be a citizen is to have a calling.

One can grant that and take up the burden of democratic action, yet see it precisely as a moral burden, not as a joy or a prospect full of hope. Thinkers such as Oakeshott—conservatives in the mould of Burke—are impressed by the melancholy ‘fatality of doing’. They discourage action when that action seems to aim too high. They fear, as did the Greeks, hubris. When ambitious projects of social change will inevitably uproot ancient customs, habits, practices, or values, they resist. It is both a matter of preserving something traditional that seems to them better, wiser, and in the end more benign and a matter of resisting folly. There is much wisdom in such a stance. When hope is disciplined as a virtue it recognizes that wisdom. When hope rises to a virtue it eschews the enthusiasms of the moment and is straightened. It rejects the fantastic and touches the real. Its range may narrow, but its depth grows. The act of hope is an affirmation of the enduring goodness of being. The hopeful person chooses life, wards off despondency, and asserts a truth about goodness in the face of nihilism and despair. Hope finds meaning in the depths of experience and finds those depths protected by the best of inherited traditions and practices. Hope wants meaning to endure and is leery of claims to improve on it.

Hope in a democratic age, in a liberal society, should be deep and wise; it should draw its strength from the abiding values of the society and from the ancient traditions of value that precede the society. Hope should flow from the conviction that the basic political institutions are

⁶ Hanna Rosin, ‘American Murder Mystery’, *The Atlantic* (July/Aug. 2008) <<http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200807/memphis-crime>>.

just; that their justice, although imperfect, is genuine. Hope can focus on enhancing the justice of institutions, of bringing practice ever closer to ideal. Hope should also flow from the conviction that the inherited traditions of moral culture that animate the society, above and beyond the formal institutions of government, are right and good. Although also imperfect, they none the less enable human flourishing. The realm of civil society is a moral realm. Its many moralities compete with and condition one another. Civil society is a sphere where values are articulated, pursued, and realized in the lives of citizens and associations. This is the primary sphere for the moral formation of persons and is as such precious. Civil society provides what Peter Berger calls the 'plausibility structure' for hope, that is, the set of social conditions without which hope would be unintelligible.

This is the common sense of the contemporary movement for the renewal of civil society. Whether trumpeted by civic republicans, traditional liberals, conservatives, or others, political thinkers increasingly regard civil society as the 'seedbed of virtue' a democratic society needs to survive. The institutions of civil society, such as the family, which Burke called 'the little platoon we belong to in society' is 'the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affection'.⁷ We learn the habits and virtues needed for democratic self-government in such forums as the family, the voluntary association, the community, the Church and, on some accounts, the market. The social trust, the sense of worth, reciprocity, confidence in joint action, critical thought, and tolerance on which a self-governing society rests cannot be inculcated by the formal mechanisms of government. These personal and civic virtues are widely thought to develop in the familial and social worlds of the pre-political but none the less publicly salient civil society. The perceived decline of the institutions of civil society, addressed in innumerable studies (but perhaps none so iconic as Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone*), is therefore an eminently political concern.⁸ If it is true, for example, that the seedbed of good citizenship is the family, then it follows that democratic government must take an interest in families; that it ought to adopt pro-family public policies. If it is true that

⁷ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* [1790] (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1979), 59.

⁸ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001). See also Jonathan Sacks, *The Politics of Hope* (London: Vintage, 2000).

citizens learn the virtues of reciprocity, trust, confidence—indeed, of hope—in houses of worship, then government ought to adopt policies that strengthen, or at least do not weaken, such institutions.

Discussions of the perils and promise of civil society are often fraught. Critics accuse civil society revivalists of deflecting attention away from governmental action and of providing cover for diminishing government's role in the solution of social problems. From a civil society point of view, the Charitable Choice Program, initiated under President Clinton in the 1996 welfare reform legislation and greatly expanded by President Bush as the 'Faith Based Initiative', made good sense. It allowed primary civil society institutions more of a role in solving heretofore intractable social problems.⁹ Critics, however, saw this trend as enfeebling government and helping it shirk its proper role, let alone violating the separation of church and state. Similarly, emphasis on the family—especially on the traditional, two-parent, married, heterosexual family—as an institution affording the best life chances for children reared within it occasions a host of criticisms. Such a family model overlooks the gender hierarchy, domestic violence, provincialism, and inequity sometimes found in the historic nuclear family; it discriminates against one-parent families, against same-sex couples, and so on. Large questions about the propriety of government privileging some families and ignoring or disparaging others are pertinent. It is difficult for proponents of civil society renewal to rise above a selective nostalgia for a time before things fell apart and the centre failed to hold. Feminist critics argue that pro-marriage and pro-traditional-family public policies leave inequitable and anti-democratic conceptions of worth unaddressed.¹⁰

The idea that all of our 'little platoons' must operate by democratic norms in order to contribute positively to democratic society is appealing but wrong. It was the idea that underwrote Protestant nativism in the nineteenth century. Nativists thought that in so far as Catholics had a non-democratic ecclesiastical polity—their church was hierarchical—they could not adapt culturally to a democratic,

⁹ For a comprehensive explication and defence of problem-solving partnerships between religious institutions and government, see John J. Dilulio, Jr, *Godly Republic: A Centrist Blueprint for America's Faith-based Future* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2007).

¹⁰ Linda C. McClain, *The Place of Families: Fostering Capacity, Equality, and Responsibility* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 58, 67.

Protestant America. This view, which turned out almost immediately to be empirically wrong, betrayed a deficit of hope in both the capacities of fellow citizens and in the appeal of democratic ideals and values. One might say that it is also an instance of the fallacy of division, the view that every member of a class must have the same characteristics as the class as a whole. The Catholic Church is not a democracy, but its members are no less good democrats for that. Indeed, one should argue that, to the extent that such institutions provide rich, traditional countercultures with complex inherited teachings about human worth and public meaning, their contribution to liberal society is immense. They prevent monism and complacency. The Third Reich, before it came after the Jews, began to destroy or co-opt potential centres of resistance within the society, such as unions, churches, voluntary organizations, and political parties. It destroyed civil society. A totalitarian state cannot tolerate pluralism. The mere existence of traditional, influential groups entirely distinct from formal institutions of government helps to keep government within limits. Civil society, especially the religious groups within it, as Tocqueville rightly said, take no share in politics but are the first political institutions of a democratic state.

From this point of view, it is not essential that civil society institutions enact democratic norms in their internal operation. Families need not be miniature democracies, nor should churches. The virtues they inculcate and the values they reproduce may exceed the problem of an internal democratic deficit. But one would not want to give *carte blanche* to this principle. Families, private schools, extremist religious organizations that inculcate racism, violence, and other ideological perversities are a problem. None the less, a liberal polity should be loathe to intervene unless the stakes are high and there are no other options. Civil society institutions do not need to be congruent with democratic norms in order generate values helpful to democracy.

It is in the institutions of civil society that persons learn to hope. Parents teach children, when all goes well, to trust, share, respect, listen, assess, and judge. They teach them to have confidence in the family's values. They show them that they are loved and that they can love in return. The interactions of family members are the matrix out of which hope, as the intuition of the goodness of being and as the expectation of the flourishing of goodness in the future, grows. Traditions and institutions that shape families, especially the religious communities, provide languages, symbols, practices, and opportunities

for the further articulation of value. The intuition of goodness can rise to affirmation in a moral vocabulary inherited from tradition. It is one thing to feel the sheer power and pleasure of, say, animal vitality within oneself; it is another to understand it through the story of Genesis, where God pronounces his creation good. To embrace a story allows for a more ramified affirmation. Religious traditions give order, endurance, and narrative coherence to intuitions, emotions, and glimpses of value. They order worlds of meaning. Truth-bearing stories, as we have seen, are the seedbeds of virtue.

Civil society institutions nurture hope in another way. They are forums for human agency, spaces where persons can engage together in action in Arendt's sense. As hope is tied to agency, schools where agency is stimulated, deployed, nurtured, and tested are essential if hope is to be cultivated. Persons need to learn that their action can matter. It is more likely that action can matter in the 'little platoons' than in the anonymous spaces of a mass society. If citizen participation, that is, deliberative democracy, is what counts then the skills of participation learned in non-political settings are essential. The immense charitable, educational, social service, social capital-building enterprise of houses of worship is a powerful framework for schooling human agency. Persons not only do good, they learn the skills of doing good; they learn that hope can be fulfilled.¹¹ Hope is ratified by projects that succeed at a local level and on a manageable scale. Where persons enact their values through cooperative action and achieve something tangible, hope is shown to have traction, to be plausible and warranted. The investment of hope in cooperative public action at the level of civil society makes sense: all the more reason that government should assist or at least refrain from discouraging the spontaneous, hopeful projects of the voluntary and traditional communities that comprise civil society.

What then of government per se in the matter of hope? In so far as hope is a virtue, one should be able to give reasons, if asked, for why the actions and attitudes implied by it are, in fact, excellent. Hope is scaled to reason; to hope for irrational, unwarranted, or wrongful things is not virtuous. (We should hope, Kant thought, not to be

¹¹ Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 317.

happy but to be deserving of happiness by living in a virtuous manner.) What reasons could one give for investing hope in a democratic government? Obviously, there are many. Looking at the real successes of the democratic project, citizens can give reasons for their hope for the future. Securing liberty—‘the last best hope of earth’—through democracy is a formidable human achievement, never to be taken lightly. Citizens are entitled to hope that liberty endures and to work to ensure that it does. Maintaining institutions of justice where the rule of law, grounded in fundamental respect for the equal rights and dignity of persons, prevails is an ongoing project of conservation and correction. Citizens are entitled to hope that such institutions remain vigorous. Defending the country against hostile enemies through military force is a stern necessity. Citizens ought to hope that government is capable of doing so and ought to work to make sure that it can. Working on behalf of an economy that is sufficiently dynamic to reward work and initiative and to allow for growth and prosperity, especially for those currently disadvantaged, is a worthy hope. Hopes of this order—that is, hope for the endurance and advancement of basic constitutional features of the polity—are warranted. If it is actual, it is possible. The successes of American constitutional government, over a period of more than two centuries, warrant the conviction that it is possible for it to endure, adapt, and be strengthened. Were citizens to abandon their hope for the endurance of a free, just, and prosperous society, they would forfeit the right to have one.

The investment of hope in the entitlement and social programmes of the welfare state is more problematic. Unlike the hope for the endurance of civil society institutions and for the institutions of constitutional government, hope for entitlements and social programmes has a self-contradictory character, when considered in the light of hope *qua* virtue. Despite the imperfect justice often obtained through the judicial system, one can still believe in the basic justice of the courts. Despite the abuses of, say, the military procurement system, one can still believe that the military works. One can have hope for these basic institutions in so far as they secure a framework for citizens to pursue their projects and live their lives. Constant attention and criticism, some of it provided by journalism, by citizen oversight, by self-correcting features of government structured according to separation of powers, reinforce the legitimate authority and credibility (however battered) of government. Is the situation similar with, for example,

Social Security, Medicare, or the various welfare programmes? The complexity, inefficiency, mismanagement, fiscal problems, etc. that beset these programmes are not different in kind from the problems that the other, older departments of government face. What is different is that entitlement programmes, as well as the far-flung activities of the modern regulatory state, continue to face basic questions of legitimacy owing to deep differences of political outlook among citizens. Entitlement and welfare programmes do not simply provide a political framework in which citizens independently conduct their lives. Rather, it is in the nature of these programmes to allow citizens to become dependent upon government. Social Security, for example, shifted the burden of support for the elderly indigent from families, voluntary associations, and religious institutions, which, during the Great Depression, could no longer cope with the scale of need, to government. The Roosevelt administration sold the programme not as a government 'hand out', which would have offended the classic American value of independence, but as a form of insurance, which was in accord with traditional American prudence and foresight. The growth of the programme over the decades undoubtedly brought much security, assistance, and, indeed, hope, to retirees and others but it also entangled tens of millions of citizens into a new kind of dependence on government. What it will take to save Social Security from eventual bankruptcy will undoubtedly cause hardship to some recipients. One can certainly argue that the benefits of all such programmes outweigh the costs, but to the extent that such programmes diminish agency through dependency, they are problematic from the standpoint of hope.

Hope should be directed to restoring and enhancing one's agency, not to compromising or diminishing it. A classic example of this is the traditional Jewish provision of welfare to needy members of the community. The aim of Jewish practice was to enable the indigent to become contributing, non-dependent members of the community.¹² Indeed, during the time when a (means-tested) recipient of communal charity (*tzedakah*) was receiving assistance, that person had to give a portion of it back as his or her own contribution to the common good.

¹² Based on such sources as Lev. 19: 9–10; 25: 35, Deut. 15: 7–8, 24: 19 rabbinic Judaism developed a wide-ranging welfare system. See, e.g., B. Ketubot 67b; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilchot Matnot 'Aniyim*, ch. 7; *Shulchan Arukh*, *Yoreh Deah*, *Hilchot Tzedakah*, paras. 247–59.

The threat of a culture of dependency, with its dehumanizing diminution of agency, was keenly felt in the Jewish sources and combated in Jewish communal practice.

We ought then to hope in government to the extent that it is capable of enabling citizens to lead good communal and personal lives. A key function of government in this respect is the provision of education. Government must not have a monopoly on the means by which education is provided—that would impoverish civil society and violate the rights of parents to educate their children in their own traditions. None the less, government must take a strong interest in making sure that citizens have access to education, an interest recognized by Congress as far back as the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. An educated citizenry is a prerequisite of democratic governance. The knowledge of public affairs, understanding of government, and ability to identify and correct abuses of power are impossible to sustain without education. Education must lead to independent, critical, yet connected citizens. Without properly functioning systems of education, hope will wither along with democracy. Government should devolve monopolistic patterns of education into local, diverse, competitive parent and teacher guided models, such as charter schools. Where stakeholders believe that they can actually choose, change, and improve schools, hope for their own and their children's future becomes plausible. In so far as the empirical data on school performance warrant it, government should allow the range of educational options to expand. It should trust that the gain in hope parents and children experience will offset whatever perceived deficit in coherence, control, and centralization may occur.

The implication of hope as a virtue for politics is an attitude of deference towards what citizens in civil society can accomplish on their own initiative through political action.

At the edge of the future are anxieties that threaten all of our hopes. Democratic societies seem to rest on prosperity and stability. What if those are lost—not just as temporary setbacks but as permanent conditions? Today, we often imagine a future more apocalyptic than hopeful. The end of oil might mean a vast collapse of an entire way of life; recovery of a national, or international, civilization may not be possible without inexpensive, easily available fuel.¹³ A new dark ages

¹³ A particularly dismal vision is that of James Howard Kunstler, *The Long Emergency: Surviving the Converging Catastrophes of the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2005).

may be in the offing. The apocalypse of climate change challenges our hope for the future. Part of the now widespread conviction that global warming is caused by human activity may be its implicit corollary of hope: if we caused it, maybe we can reverse it. An avenue of agency awaits, frustrated only by lack of political will. Political action on a heretofore unprecedented international scale could preserve our hope for a recognizable future. But, if climate change, whether or not caused by a century of the use of carbon-based fuel, cannot be stopped what then of our hope? Will the residents of sinking coastal cities (or nations, such as Bangladesh), encroaching deserts, or warming tundra go on the march, driven by hope for a stable life elsewhere? Perhaps such hope drove the earliest hominids out of Africa and across the globe millennia ago; perhaps hope is what it means to be human. Or would they abandon hope? Would humanity enter into a suicide pact, ceasing to be fully human?

Dreadful things do occur, often through the means of politics. Virtue does not inoculate us, in the Stoic style, against the effects of evil. None the less, the virtue of hope allows us to reject evil, regardless of its source, as the last word. The knowledge of hope allows us to resist tragedy and despair as the last wisdom. It may be the case that life is no more than a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing, and heading for a bad end. It may be the case, but we are on solid ground to doubt that it is so. The grounds to reject this sad wisdom are stronger than the grounds to embrace it. We know better than to despair. We know what it means to hope.

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