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### **Hope and Reasons**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Many philosophers have doubted that hope is capable of rational assessment. Hume portrays hope as a passion directed towards an object of desire.<sup>1</sup> Hume, of course, is generally skeptical that passions can be directed by reasons. St. Thomas Aquinas understands hope, like other theological virtues, as directed towards God, infused in us by God alone, and made known to us by divine revelation.<sup>2</sup> It is because of hope that we take the end of supernatural happiness to be possible.<sup>3</sup> According to Aquinas, the theological virtues, unlike the virtues of character, are not cultivated by means of habit but “are entirely from the outside”<sup>4</sup> and “produced in us by divine operation alone.”<sup>5</sup> There is, of course, no orthodox position in the history of Western Philosophy about whether hope can be rationally assessed, but there are important traditions that cast doubt on that. This paper argues for an alternative to those traditions. I argue that hope can be understood as an attitude or an attitudinal complex that is partially sensitive to reasons.

There are at least two ways in which an attitude might be sensitive to reasons. One is that it may be *permitted* given the reasons available. The idea is that there are norms of justification and criticism that must be satisfied in order for the attitude, in this case hope, to be reasonable, warranted, or well placed. I use those terms interchangeably in this paper. Beliefs are typically thought of as having this sort of reason-sensitivity. Think of John Rawls’s account of the burdens of reason. It seems plausible, Rawls holds, that some beliefs (say theoretical claims in science or theology) are reasonable as long as they satisfy thresholds, say, of sensitivity to evidence or of consistency with other important understandings of how the world works, but these are not beliefs that everyone presented with the relevant evidence must adopt on pain of being unreasonable.<sup>6</sup> Even if there is a best interpretation of the evidence (which presumably is not always the case), other interpretations may be reasonable. Intentions to act seem also to have such reason-sensitivity. According to common sense morality, if not to utilitarianism, some intentions to act, say to pursue a career

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<sup>1</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), Bk II, Part III, Sec. IX, p. 438-448.

<sup>2</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (New York: The Modern Library, 1948), II, pt. II, question LXII, article 1. p. 591.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, article 3. p. 594.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Question LXIII, article 1, p.599.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, article 2, p. 601.

<sup>6</sup> John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 54-58.

of humanitarian service, are reasonable in the sense of being permissible, even admirable, but are typically not required of people generally. Permissions are one thing, requirements another.

Attitudes might also be *required* in light of the reasons. In contrast to the license granted by permissions, some attitudes are requirements of rational or reasonable norms. This is familiar in the case of belief. The “QED” at the end of a Euclidian proof is meant to signify that the acceptance of the theorem is not optional. There are epistemological and logical norms that compel some beliefs. Likewise, there are moral and prudential norms that compel some intentions to act. The intention to honor a promise, for example, is required, at least *pro tanto*. The claim that an attitude is required does not entail that an agent is rightfully criticized for not holding it. There might be excuses for any number of reasons.

I begin by explicating what I take to be the norms that must be satisfied in order for hopes to be permitted. Only after that do I consider whether and when hope is ever required. Between the discussion of permission and requirement there is a segue that addresses the question of where to place the burden of establishing that the permissions are satisfied. The argument concludes that hope is permitted only if adequate reasons for hoping exists, but that although hoping may be good, it is not required. One way to describe that conclusion, then, is that unlike beliefs and intentions to act, hope is only partially sensitive to reasons, sometimes permitted but never, except perhaps remedially, required.

I don’t discuss the psychological make-up of hope. I try to remain neutral between two main accounts of this. Compound accounts take hope to consist in at least two psychological states, a belief about the possibility of the object of hope and a desire for that object.<sup>7</sup> Typically, the debate among these accounts concerns the character of a third state that serves to distinguish hope from despair.<sup>8</sup> Alternatively, simple accounts take hope to be a distinct state, neither a belief nor a desire perhaps some kind of *besire*, which is both cognitive and motivational.<sup>9</sup> The following discussion

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<sup>7</sup> The terminology “compound accounts” comes from Darrel Moellendorf, “Hope as a Political Virtue,” *Philosophical Papers* 35 (2006): 415.

<sup>8</sup> For this way of describing the problem see Ariel Meirev, “The Nature of Hope,” *Ratio* XXII (2009): 216-233.

<sup>9</sup> For the terminology see Moellendorf, “Hope as a Political Virtue,” 417. On besires see J.E.J. Atham, “The Legacy of Emotivism,” in Graham McDonald and Crispin Wright, eds. *Fact, Science and Morality*:

simply assumes that hope has a cognitive aspect and a motivational aspect. Whether these are aspects of two different attitudes or of a singular one is left open.

## I. COMPARISONS

As a methodological approach, I suggest that headway can be made by considering the conditions in which claims about the impermissibility of a reason-sensitive attitude are true. That can serve to indicate when an attitude is permitted. That there are such conditions for hope can be shown by comparing hope to belief and intentions to act.

Start then with a criticism of belief:

(1) P believes falsely that X.

Presumably, this claim is true iff P believes that X and it is not the case that X. The direction of fit is from the world to belief. If a belief does not track the world as it is, then the belief is false. That is a fact-relative criticism of belief. But there could also be an evidence- relative criticism.<sup>10</sup>

(2) P believes unjustifiably that X.

Presumably, this claim is true iff P believes that X and there is insufficient evidence available to P to justify the belief that X.

Whatever kind of psychological state hope is, I assume that it is like belief insofar as it has an epistemic component. But the responsiveness to the world that hope requires is different than belief's responsiveness. Unlike belief, hope is not necessarily directed towards affirmation of what is the case. Rather, hope is directed towards that which might be the case, towards that which is *sufficiently* possible. For example, many Americans hope that there will be a female president one day. Although it is far from clear when that will be, intuitively the possibility seems likely enough for the hope to be reasonable.

One way in which hoping can be criticized as false then is if the object of the hope is insufficiently likely to come to pass, at the limit if the object of hope is in some way impossible. Short of impossibility, there are cases of extreme unlikelihood. Imagine someone who hopes that Angela Merkel will become President of the United States. Because Angela Merkel is not a natural born citizen of the United States, by article of

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*Essays on A.J. Ayer's Language, Truth, and Logic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 284-285 and Simon Blackburn, *Ruling Passions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 97-100.

<sup>10</sup> The distinction is derived from Derek Parfit, *On What Matters* vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 150-51.

two of the US Constitution she may not, barring constitutional amendment, become President. Certainly, amendments to the US Constitution are possible, but some are more likely than others. The amendment to the clause that would be required to make the realization of the hope of Frau Merkel becoming president is, it's safe to say, very highly unlikely. Intuitively the threshold for the possibility of a hope seems not to be satisfied in that case. In that sense, then, the person hoping for Merkel's US presidency hopes implausibly.

In light of the considerations above, let's consider the following kind of claim:

(3) P hopes implausibly that E.

If the epistemic aspects of hope parallel those of belief, this claim would be true iff P hopes that E and E fails to satisfy an appropriate probability threshold. But hope is surely distinct from belief in being consistent with much more doubt than belief is.<sup>11</sup> There is a probability threshold that is a necessary condition of plausible hoping, but it is much lower than that for believing. This suggests that there is a fact-relative epistemic norm of permissible hoping.

Like belief, hope also seems to be evidence-relative. Insofar as the evidence of the constitutional requirement of being a natural born citizen is readily accessible, and the extreme unlikelihood of that clause being amended is also readily accessible, it seems reasonable to maintain that the person hoping for Frau Merkel's presidency hopes unjustifiably. That permits a straightforward analysis of claims like the following:

(4) P hopes unjustifiably that E.

To the extent that the epistemic features of hope parallel belief, this claim would be true iff P hopes that E and E fails to satisfy an appropriate evidential threshold, whatever that is. My point is only that there would seem to be such a threshold, not to specify what it is.

However, failing to meet a necessary epistemic standard is not the only way a hope might go wrong. Sometimes people seem to hope for what they should not. The failure in those cases is not that the object is too unlikely. In such cases the criticism of hoping resembles more nearly the kind of criticism that might be offered about an action rather than a belief. To see the comparison, consider the following claim:

(5) P acts wrongly when φ-ing.

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<sup>11</sup> See Moellendorf, "Hope as a Political Virtue," 417:

This is the case iff  $P \varphi$ -s and it is not the case that  $P$  may  $\varphi$ . If an action is not permitted, then it is wrong to do it. Similar moral standards might apply to the objects of hope. If so, the claim that

(6)  $P$  hopes wrongly that  $E$

is true iff  $P$  hopes that  $E$  and  $E$  is either an instance of wrong doing or a state of affairs that is morally bad. Many a patriot of the Confederate States of America hoped wrongly for the triumph of Gen. Robert E. Lee's army at Gettysburg. The criticism of the hope is not due to the object of the hope failing to meet a probability or evidential threshold. Rather, the hoped for outcome of the battle would have strengthened a military pursuing a deeply unjust, even evil, cause.

One might suspect that hoping wrongly is just an instance of acting wrongly. But I don't think that that is correct. In acting wrongly the direction of fit is from the agent to the world. The agent is attempting to change the world in way that she should not. Although a hope might be a reason to act, and it seems to project into the world an idea of how it should be, it need involve nothing more than mental activity. It is not acting in the standard sense. Hoping for my favorite football team to win in no way contributes to the cause, even though admittedly sometimes it feels like it does. And hoping that my son passed a test he took yesterday is also impotent to produce the outcome. So, when hoping is wrong it is not because it is an action, at least in the standard sense, that is wrong. This even if the standards that apply to hoping include those that we would apply to acting. Incidentally, they seem also to include standards that would apply to the badness of the state of affairs hoped for.

There are necessary conditions, I've been arguing, that hoping must satisfy to be acceptable, acceptable either epistemically or morally. Hope is, then, at least partially sensitive to reasons.

## II. COSTS, THRESHOLDS, AND BURDENS

Hoping can be criticized if it fails satisfy an appropriate probability or evidential threshold. It doesn't follow that there is a single threshold for warranted hope. Different hopes might be warranted under different factual and evidential scenarios depending on the circumstances, and those circumstances might depend on some sort of pragmatic, cost/benefit, calculation regarding hoping. Even in the case of belief, the threshold of justification for some practices incorporates pragmatic

considerations. For example, the threshold of justification for legal liability varies under different kinds of sanctions. In a criminal proceeding, where there is a threat to the life or liberty of the accused, the threshold can be much higher than in civil case, where that is not the case.

The case for a pragmatic approach to the epistemic standards for hope seems all the more plausible in part because hoping is not about accurately tracking the world. Although in the case of the epistemic norms of hope, the direction of fit is from the world to the hope, hope is not as tightly tethered to the world as is belief. It is noteworthy that hopes are often expressed in the subjunctive mood, not the indicative.

Consider one fundamentally pragmatic concern. What is lost in hoping? The question invites considering the opportunity costs of hoping in particular cases. The judgment of whether the costs are acceptable will depend on the circumstances. If the opportunity costs are high, because hoping for a particular political campaign victory encourages a strategy that could result in a crushing defeat, then the evidential threshold for hope might be high. If there is little to be lost in a patient hoping for a cure, then perhaps the threshold is quite low.

The example of the legal establishment of the belief in guilt or liability raises yet another issue. In many legal jurisdictions, the accused is assumed to be innocent or not liable. The burden of proof lies on establishing the belief in guilt or liability. The parallel with hoping would be that a hope would carry the presumption of being warranted unless demonstrated not to be. In contrast a hope could be considered unwarranted unless it is shown to be backed by sufficient evidence. In the case of belief the presumption is often against believing. This is the case in the law, for example, when belief in guilt or liability is at issue. It is also often the case in science when belief in a new entity or natural mechanism is at stake. In both cases there is a kind of epistemic conservatism. In these cases there is a presumption against altering our beliefs unless we can be convinced otherwise.

A conservative approach to the burden of proof when it comes to belief adoption seems to have certain virtues. Apart from the obvious dangers in particular cases of convicting the innocent or affirming a non-existent feature of the natural world, say a solar epicycle, there may be good reason in general not to supplement the fabric of belief too quickly since any addition has implications for a coherent understanding of

the world. The aspiration to have and maintain a coherent set of beliefs favors of a conservative approach to the burden of proof for beliefs.

In contrast, however, if our hopes are inconsistent the threat is not theoretical incoherence since in hoping we are not affirming the way the world is, but how we think it should be. Still, if hopes supply reasons for actions, then practical rationality depends on one's hopes being consistent. Insofar as hopes provide reasons for action, inconsistent hopes can lead to paralysis. That suggests a reason to favor the following conservative burden for hope formation:

(7) Hope for E is assumed not to meet the necessary evidentiary threshold unless there is sufficient evidence that it does.

Recall that I have suggested a pragmatic approach to the threshold, taking into consideration the opportunity costs of hoping. Compare (7) to an alternative permissive view about hope adoption that would put the evidential burden on those denying hope.

(8) Hope for E is assumed to meet the necessary evidentiary threshold unless there is sufficient evidence that it does not.

The difference between (7) and (8) is not about where to set the threshold, but about where the burden lies when people are discussing the evidence for some particular hope. The threshold could be the same. (8) permits hope in the absence of evidence that the threshold has been met. (7) is critical of hope until the evidence shows that the threshold has been met.

How permissive should we be in setting the evidential burden for justified hoping? One argument favoring permissiveness is basically pragmatic. Although there are good reasons to sanction false beliefs and wrong intentions, the reasons to sanction misplaced hopes are less strong. A person with an unjustified belief might be thought of as suffering a kind of malfunction in her capacity that tracks the world. Her belief might be true, but if so that would seem to be accidental. Criticizing her belief as unjustified could be a way of holding her responsible for that malfunction; it might serve to discipline that capacity so that it tracks the world better. A person who acts wrongly might be thought of as failing to conform her action to justified moral norms of action. Criticism of the action holds her responsible for the wrongdoing, and it might serve to discipline her capacity to act according to the right and the good. Seen this way the true and the right discipline our beliefs and actions. What goes wrong

when hoping is unjustified or wrong? There does not seem to be an alternative independent norm of comparable importance that disciplines our hoping. Instead, the criticism of hopes relies on epistemic norms (albeit with different thresholds) applied to beliefs and either moral norms applied to actions or axiological norms applied to states of affairs. But neither the true nor the right is directly at stake in hoping. As I mentioned, hopes are naturally expressed in a subjunctive mood. A person hoping does not risk a suit for fraud. And hoping is neither an act nor an intention to act. So, wrongful hope does not merit sanction as a moral crime or misdemeanor. One might think, then, that nothing much is at stake with hoping. If getting it wrong matters so very little, then perhaps we should be as free with our hopes as we are with our wishes and fancies. This is the counsel of permissiveness; people are free to hope until their hopes are demonstrably unwarranted or wrong.

The argument for a permissive burden is, however, overstated. First, getting it wrong matters. There are opportunity costs to hoping, like any other attitude, and these are relevant not only the threshold of evidence for hoping, but to the argument above in favor or permissiveness. Hoping is not altogether idle. Insofar as hoping is a dispositional complex, when we adopt a hope, there are various actions, emotions, and other attitudes that are ruled out by norms of consistency.

The case for conservatism is bolstered in light of the opportunity costs of hoping. Adrienne M. Martin argues that fantasizing is a common way in which hope manifests in persons hoping. Others include praying for an outcome, pleading with the universe for it, anticipating it, and engaging in hedged reliance on it.<sup>12</sup> In an account similar to Ernst Bloch's she takes fantasizing as the paradigmatic manifestation of hope because it involves an imaginative narrative structure of what it would be like if the object of hope were realized.<sup>13</sup> Victoria McGeer claims that hope involves, "actively engaging with our own current limitations in affecting the future we want to inhabit."<sup>14</sup> Philip Pettit suggests that hope can lead to action, as if the object of hope were going

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<sup>12</sup> Adrienne Martin, *How We Hope. A Moral Psychology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 28.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p. 26. Ernst Bloch begins *The Principle of Hope* with section entitled "Little Day Dreams. See *The Principle of Hope* vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1986).

<sup>14</sup> Victoria McGeer, "The Art of Good Hope," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 592 (2004): 104

to obtain.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Louis Pojman claims that hoping involves a disposition to act to bring the object of hope about to the extent that one can so act.<sup>16</sup> One cannot consistently hope for an outcome and pray that it not occur, fantasize that it won't materialize, or act to thwart it.

Across a range of several very different accounts, hoping excludes pursuing other valuable ends and activities. What is more, Luc Bovens contends that hoping can lead us to overestimate the likelihood of achieving the hoped for end and thereby lead to failure.<sup>17</sup> To the extent that there are opportunity costs to hoping, and failure is more likely than people hoping would like to consider, perhaps a more conservative approach to hope adoption might be warranted, as is expressed by claim (7).

Plenty of examples seem to suggest the merits of conservatism. Consider the terminally ill person who fantasizes about recovery, rather than planning her estate. Sometimes one's well-being would be better served by coming to accept one's circumstances rather than fantasizing about a future in which they are different. Think again of that same patient, who could perhaps achieve a measure of enjoyment by focusing on the activities she enjoys, conversation with family and friends, gardening, reading, painting and so on rather than hedged planning for a better future that probably will never come to pass. Or imagine a political activist who might reject attainable, modest, but real reforms because these would take away from planning and building support for some even better and more thorough-going, but far less likely, change.

Additionally, although it seems that we can err in adopting hopes, it is less clear that we can be criticized for failing to hope. If this is correct, hopes differ from beliefs and intentions to act. We can sometimes justifiably criticize a *failure* to form a belief given the evidence or the failure to act given the reasons. Both beliefs and intentions are subject not only to necessary conditions but also sufficient ones. In other words, the reason-sensitivity of both believing and intending seems to include not only *permissions* but also *requirements*. It is less clear that we are ever similarly required to hope. If we are never required to hope, then a person errs only when adopting

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<sup>15</sup> Philip Pettit, "Hope and Its Place in Mind," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 592 (2004): 158.

<sup>16</sup> Louis Pojman, "Faith without Belief," *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986): 162.

<sup>17</sup> Luc Bovens, "The Value of Hope," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 59 (1999): 680.

hopes, when a hope is unwarranted, and never in not hoping. If the only possibility for getting it wrong is in hoping, that suggests a reason to be conservative about the hopes one forms.

### III. FROM BENEFITS TO REQUIREMENTS?

Surely, there are benefits as well as opportunity costs of hoping. In this section I discuss two possible benefits, hope's motivating capacity in the pursuit of what it is rational to pursue and hope's prophylactic capacity against anxiety. I consider whether these benefits require us to reconsider the claims of the previous section.

One benefit that hope provides is its service in motivating rational action when motivation is otherwise failing. Borrowing a term from Joseph Raz, I call this *the service conception of hope*.<sup>18</sup> Imagine a choice limited to just two courses of action, where pursuing one course of action forecloses pursuing the other:

**Action A:** The evidence supports that the belief that the benefits of achieving the end pursued are 100, the opportunity costs are 20, and the likelihood of success is 0.3. The net benefits in this case are 80, and the expected value is 24.

**Action B:** The evidence supports the belief that the benefits are 20, the opportunity costs are 2, and the likelihood of success is 0.7. The net benefits are 18; the expected value is 12.6.

Additionally, doing nothing has the least expected value.

Although Action A has greater opportunity costs, and is much less likely to succeed, it would nonetheless be rational to pursue it, rather than Action B. However, given the low probability of success and the high opportunity costs, one might shrink in fear from the pursuit of Action A. Both Bovens and Pettit argue that hope can sometimes help to motivate.<sup>19</sup> The service conception points out that hope can serve to overcome psychological factors that cause us to act irrationally. Hope is valuable when we would otherwise act irrationally. In that sense then hope is remedially valuable.

If hoping were necessary to achieve a beneficial outcome, then it would be rationally required. The claim of the previous section that one can err only in adopting hope

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<sup>18</sup> Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 56.

<sup>19</sup> See also Bovens, "the Value of Hope," 671-673 and Pettit, "Hope and Its Place in Mind," 157.

would be undermined. Indeed, there would seem to be cases in which it is irrational not to hope. Oddly, however, the rational requirement to hope exists only because of an irrational failure to be motivated to pursue the rational course. The remedial requirement to hope would be in that regard very different from the requirement to believe a theorem followed by QED or than the requirement to keep a promise since believing and acting in these cases are not required to correct for failure in other rational capacities. Still, the service conception suggests instances in which an agent is required, in virtue of other failures of rationality, to hope.

One problem, however, is that the example is highly idealized. Typically, the experience of hoping occurs precisely when the evidence is less clear. Without having clear evidence of the probabilities, people ask themselves whether a political strategy will succeed. In such cases, the evidential basis for the rationality of pursuing Action A is not obvious. In addition, insofar as that is the case, hoping for the outcome yielded by Action A is not necessarily evidence-relative warranted.

Are there more realistic benefits that hope provides that serve as a counterweight to costs of hoping? Consider the benefit of staving off anxiety. Hope and anxiety, or at least one kind of anxiety, bear important similarities. They are both directed towards what we value and arise because of uncertainty about its existence or attainment. Hope is enlivened by the possibility of the existence of what we value, and anxiety by the possibility of the opposite. Because of the epistemic conditions in which we hope, there is always some reason to doubt the existence or attainment of that for which we hope. Doubt opens the door to anxiety, hope can sometimes block the entrance.

We have reason to avoid the painful and sometimes even debilitating experience of anxiety. If hope is costly in terms of opportunities forgone, it may also be liberating as prophylactic against anxiety. Hope's beneficial role in our psychology may then be a reason not to restrain it by burdening it with the need to prove its epistemic credentials as the conservative approach to hope formation would do.

The benefits of hope in staving off anxiety might be real, but they don't seem unique to hope. Acceptance can, at least sometimes, play a functionally equivalent role. Epictetus counseled such an approach: "Demand not that events should happen as you wish; but wish them to happen as they do happen, and you will go on well."<sup>20</sup> Rather than focusing on the possibility of a better outcome, acceptance counsels

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<sup>20</sup> Epictetus, *The Enchiridion* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1948) VIII, p. 20.

conforming desires and emotions to whatever comes to pass to the extent that it is not in our control. Acceptance of this sort counters anxiety because if one is successful in so living there is nothing beyond our control that we fear.

Certainly many circumstances are well beyond our control. The outcome that we have reason to want is often not one that we can insure by our actions. Such circumstances can be anxiety inducing. Hope and acceptance are different attitudes towards such circumstances. Both can, in principle, play a prophylactic role against anxiety. I am not interested here in adjudicating when one or the other is a better response and why. It is enough to understand that there can be important benefits to hoping. Such benefits are reasons to think that the account of hope in the previous section is one-sided. Forming hopes is not merely matter of forgoing opportunities. That undercuts a reason for affirming conservatism about the evidential burden of hope formation. Insofar as hoping can supply an individual with the benefit of staving off anxiety about a valuable state of affairs, unless her hope demonstrably fails an appropriate threshold of probability, there is no obvious reason to dismiss her hope on epistemic grounds. She has no burden of showing her hope is justified. Although no one should hope for Frau Merkel to become the President of the United States, there is no need for anyone to demonstrate that there is a sufficient degree of probability to justify the hope that the sitting president will lose re-election. The evidential burden in that regard is on the naysayers.

#### **IV. COLLECTIVE ACTION**

The service conception of hope takes hope to supply remedial motivation for the rational pursuit of ends when individuals would otherwise fail to do so. Miscalculations of the odds or mistaken weighing of the goods could lead individuals to hold back when in fact risk-taking is rational. The oddity of the requirement to hope in such cases is twofold. First, hope's role is to motivate people to do what in a belief relative-sense is irrational.<sup>21</sup> Second, if peoples' beliefs were not mistaken, there would be no need for hope. That leads me to wonder whether there is not a more salutary role for hope in our moral psychology. Problems of collective action may offer a possibility.

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<sup>21</sup> Parfit, *On What Matters*, p. 150-151.

Consider Rawls's account of the problem of isolation. He sees the problem this way: Even among just people, "[O]nce goods are indivisible over large numbers of individuals, their actions decided upon in isolation from others will not lead to the general good."<sup>22</sup> Walter Sinnott-Armstrong vividly describes the problem of personal responsibility for CO<sub>2</sub> emissions with his example of taking a gas guzzling vintage car out for weekend joy ride.<sup>23</sup> A stable climate system, which can be achieved only by an elimination of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, would be a great public good. In the absence of policies that coordinate action, however, a person *not* enjoying the Sunday drive in a vintage car does nothing significant to serve the aim of reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, and, due to the volume of the emissions, the marginal contribution to the problem that her drive causes is insignificant. But describing the problem as a need for a regulatory framework that would require reductions, as Sinnott-Armstrong sensibly does, simply establishes the problem of isolation in another place. For the practical problems of the political effort to secure the necessary regulatory framework are daunting. The time, attention, goodwill, credibility, and the resources of activists and politicians are at stake, not merely the comparatively minor the loss of the enjoyment of a Sunday drive. And whether anyone of the possible actors contributes to the effort is for the most part inconsequential.

Even when the problem of isolation is solved, the problem of assurance arises. People's motivation to do their share to maintain the cooperative framework is dependent on the confidence that others will do so as well, "to assure the cooperating parties that the cooperative agreement is being carried out."<sup>24</sup> The problem iterates across persons and recurs. X will cooperate if Y does, Y will if Z does and Z will if X does. To overcome the problem, Rawls identifies two forces of assurance. The first is a system of sanctions. "In a large cooperative community the degree of mutual confidence in one another's integrity that renders enforcement superfluous is not to be expected. In a well-ordered society the required sanctions are no doubt mild and they may never be applied. Still, the existence of such devices

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<sup>22</sup> Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 237.

<sup>23</sup> Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, "It's Not My Fault: Global Warming and Individual Moral Obligations" in Walter Sinnott-Armstrong & Richard Howarth, eds., *Perspectives on Climate Change* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2005), p. 221–253.

<sup>24</sup> Rawls, *Theory*, p. 238

is the normal condition of human life even in this case.”<sup>25</sup> Sanctions or penalties give X a reason to cooperate that is independent of Y’s cooperation, and Y a reason that is independent of Z’s, and Z a reason that is independent of X’s. Rawls claims that in a well-ordered society sanctions may see little use, however. Presumably, this is due in part to the credibility of the threat of penalties, but it is also due to the existence of the second force of assurance, namely a sense of justice, which public institutions cultivate. “The sense of justice leads us to promote just schemes and to do our share in them when we believe that others, or sufficiently many of them, will do theirs. But in normal circumstances a reasonable assurance in this regard can only be given if there is a binding rule effectively enforced.”<sup>26</sup>

In response to the problems of isolation and assurance, Rawls argues for a two part pre-institutional or natural duty of justice: “[T]o comply with and to do our share in just institutions when they exist and apply to us; and second, we are to assist in the establishment of just institutions when they do not exist at least when this can be done with little cost to ourselves.”<sup>27</sup> The argument in favor of this twofold duty is based fundamentally on the idea that the parties to the original position, recognizing the problems of instability arising from isolation and assurance, would see the need for a pre-institutional imperative to cooperate. “[T]here is every reason for the parties to secure the stability of just institutions, and the easiest and most direct way to do this is to accept the requirement to support and to comply with them irrespective of one’s voluntary acts.”<sup>28</sup> The first part of the duty, addresses the problem of assurance by giving individuals an assurance-independent reason to act. The second part of the duty addresses the problem of isolation by giving individuals a cooperation-independent reason, within reasonable costs, to act. The natural duty of justice calls on us to act on behalf of justice regardless of consideration of what others do.

If an isolated agent, who understands the good that joint action could serve, considers only the net achievement of her action, she finds insufficient reason to act no matter what others do. If an agent seeks assurance that the opportunity costs of following mutually accepted terms would not be needlessly incurred, she will not

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 293-294.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295.

abide by the terms. In cases of both isolation and assurance, every agent's calculation of the net value of the outcome of her action supports a course of action that undermines the outcome that can only be achieved by people cooperating to pursue it.

The problem is not the one the service conception remediates, namely that individuals are not doing the calculations incorrectly. In the cases of isolation and assurance, agents' calculations are in order, but their considerations are not. The duty of justice adds a different consideration, a reason for a person to act that disregards the correctly derived net value of the outcome of an individual's action. I call such reasons *non-teleological reasons* because for an individual they preempt appeals to the net-value of outcomes. Still, when it comes to the justification of such reasons, as Rawls's defense of the natural duties justice suggests, there is room for an appeal to consequences, in particular the promotion of the stability of just institutions.

In the case of the problem of isolation, an alternative source of motivation is needed to ignore the result of calculating the net value to each agent of acting alone. The Prisoner's Dilemma illustrates the problem. In the Dilemma parties consider only the net value of the outcomes of their action to themselves, which leads to outcome worse for each than if they had cooperated. In the classic case the prisoners are faced with the following punishments (years in prison):

		Prisoner 2:	
		Not Confess	Confess
Prisoner 1:	Not Confess	1, 1	10, 0
	Confess	0, 10	5, 5

The outcome that is best for both prisoners is if neither confesses. Left isolated, however, and considering only the net the value of one's own outcome, each will reason that it is best to confess no matter what the other does. This produces the outcome with the value in the lower right corner. Call that *estrangement*.<sup>29</sup> Each party needs a reason that preempts such a calculation in order to produce the outcome in the upper left corner. Call that *cooperation*. One of the goods of a regime with the

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<sup>29</sup> See also Julius Sensat's account of estrangement in *The Logic of Estrangement* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

credible threat of punishment is that it encourages cooperative, rather than estranged, outcomes. Parties to the original position would accept a natural duty of justice precisely to avoid estrangement. When just institutions exist, the duty of justice has a stabilizing influence on the institutional structure.

Suppose there are injustices that according to the duty of justice require attention. Sustained collective action to pursue justice can be especially susceptible to instability due to the isolation of the agents. Temptations to defect may increase as the efforts to pursue justice are met with resistance and the costs of the effort are paid in penalties, contusions, and lives. If too many parties defect the outcome is estrangement. However, if a sufficient number pursue justice the outcome is cooperation. Informal sanctions among those pursuing justice might serve to motivate in a manner akin to the credible threat of legal sanction. But hope for the just outcome can also inspire. Hope can counter political demoralization, similar to the manner—discussed above—according to which it counters anxiety for individuals. Like a sense of justice, then, hope can provide a non-teleological reason. I call this *the cooperation conception of hope*.

According to the cooperation conception of hope, hope motivates agents to seek the justice that is secured by greater cooperation. Hope of this sort can help to inspire those seeking greater justice. Nevertheless, there are two reasons to think that hope of the cooperation conception type is not required. First, there seem to be other attitudes that could provide the benefit. Rawls, as we have seen, defends the duty of justice, but solidarity might also be called upon to motivate.<sup>30</sup> If there are several motivators for the pursuit of justice, then no one of them is the one that must be called upon in its pursuit. Second, the discussion suggests the perils of hoping. Acting on one's hopes can prove dangerous, and if the dangers cause others to defect, one could suffer a worse outcome. One can't be required to hope regardless of the costs of doing so.

The benefits of hoping according to the cooperation conception could be great. That seems sufficient to establish permissiveness about hope formation in collective action cases like those under discussion here. Hope seems capable of motivating agents in ways that might overcome the problem of isolation in the pursuit of the aims that

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<sup>30</sup> On solidarity see Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx*, (Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 358-371.

require collective action. For this reason, agents in such circumstances are permitted to hope, and it is their critics who must offer compelling accounts that the odds are too long to permit hoping. Permissiveness about the burden of permissions to hope is a kind of halfway station between conservatism about permission to hope and the requirement to hope.

## **V. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In this discussion I have been concerned to present hope as a reason sensitive attitude. I have noted that reason-sensitivity has two features. One concerns permissibility conditions, the other requirement conditions. Hope is permissible assuming that certain necessary conditions of likelihood and of the moral value of the object of hope are satisfied. Whether the burden of demonstrating those conditions lies with the person hoping or whether hope should be presumed to satisfy the conditions unless shown otherwise is another matter. Conservatism about hope formation holds that the burden of establishing the permission to hope lies with the person hoping. Hopes should be considered unjustified unless they can be justified. Such conservatism might be defended by an appeal to the opportunity costs of hoping and by the claim that hope is never required. One way to defeat conservatism about hope formation is to show hope is reason-sensitive in the second sense. Doing so has proven elusive. Hope may promote rational ends, but then only remedially so. It may stave off anxiety, but it seems doubtful that it is unique in doing so. There are circumstances in which hope provides a non-teleological reason that overcomes the isolation that inhibits collective social and political struggles. However, other kinds of reasons are also able to overcome isolation. And the costs of acting on hope in such circumstances can be very high. These arguments suggest that hope may be permitted given the right reasons, and that its benefits are significant enough that the burden of justification should be on those challenging hope. Although permitted, hope is never required.