Hope and Its Place in Mind

By
PHILIP PETTIT

People may have open minds on whether a life-extending drug or technology is going to be developed before their sixties and may strongly desire that development. Do they therefore hope that it occurs? Do they hope for it in the substantive sense of "pinning their hopes" on the development? No, they do not. Hoping for a prospect in that sense certainly presupposes having an open mind on whether it will occur and having a desire for its occurrence. But, more crucially, it means investing the prospect with a characteristic, galvanizing, and orientating role: it involves setting aside doubts about the possible nonoccurrence of the prospect and acting accordingly. This article offers a characterization of hope in that substantive sense and argues both that it can be rational and that it is ubiquitous.

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Hope does not bulk large, indeed it scarcely bulks at all, among the topics that have engaged philosophers over the last half century or so. Philosophers of mind ignore it completely and even moral philosophers have given it short shrift. When hope has received philosophical treatment, it has tended to be among theologians and others of a markedly religious bent.

Perhaps, the main reason hope has slipped professional philosophical attention in this way is that it looks on a superficial analysis like it scarcely deserves attention. I argue that while this analysis may apply to a loose, lowest-common-denominator usage of the term *hope*, we should

Philip Pettit teaches political theory and philosophy at Princeton University, where he is William Nelson Cromwell Professor of Politics. He writes on the philosophy of cognitive and social science and on moral and political theory. Among his recent books are Republicanism *(1997),* A Theory of Freedom *(2001), and a collection of his papers,* Rules, Reasons, and Norms *(2002).*

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also recognize a more specific usage in which it refers to a phenomenon with a characteristic identity of its own. I believe that hope in this substantial sense is a very distinctive state of mind and that it has both a rational and ubiquitous place in human life.

The essay is divided into five sections. The first presents the analysis of hope in terms of a lowest common denominator of usage. The second prepares the way for going beyond that analysis by presenting an account of how precaution operates. The third section, drawing on the analogy with precaution, introduces hope in the substantial sense. The fourth section emphasizes how such hope, like precaution, can be perfectly rational. And the last section makes a case for its ubiquity.

Superficial Hope

The word *hope* is used under the prompting of different contexts in a great variety of ways. I may hope that I get this article written before the deadline, hope that I do not embarrass myself in a public speech, or hope that I can survive a crisis in my life. I may hope that this afternoon stays fine or that the car does not let me down on an impending journey. I may be hopeful that the rumor I heard about a friend is not true, or I may pin my hopes on the local rugby team's winning the championship. I may hope against hope that something is not the case. I may hope, as I say to someone in my charge, that I will not be disappointed with what they do. Or I may hope that there is a god in his heaven and that all is right with the world. The range of usage takes us from matters of the deepest concern to issues of only trivial importance, and it sometimes involves me or other people and sometimes purely impersonal states of affairs.

One response to this variety of usage might be to look for a lowest common denominator of analysis: to find a core meaning in the term *hope*, however thin or skeletal, that is present across all the different ways in which the word may be employed in English. I shall look at where that response would lead and then argue that it does not point us toward a phenomenon that has any interest.

To hope that something comes about, or to put one's hope in someone's achieving something, or to be hopeful that such and such has or has not happened—or anything of the kind—a first prerequisite is that one does not believe for certain that the hope is forlorn. If I hope that the afternoon will stay fine or that the rumor about my friend is not true, then I must assign a nonzero probability to the afternoon's staying fine or to the rumor's being false. I must not rule out the hoped-for possibility; I must believe that it could be realized.

One way of believing that a scenario or possibility could be realized, of course, is to believe—believe for certain—that it is realized. And just as hope requires that one not rule out the hoped-for possibility, so it requires that one does not rule it in as a matter of absolute certainty either. As I watch a television replay of a match in the knowledge that my team won, I certainly do not rule out the prospect of their winning. On the contrary, I rule it in: I am certain that they won and may well be savoring the certainty of that outcome as I relive the different plays. This certainty

means that as I watch the game, I cannot be said to hope that the team wins. Hoping that something happens may be inconsistent with believing for certain that it will not happen, but equally, it is inconsistent with believing for certain that it will.

Just to believe that something is possible but not inevitable, however, is not necessarily to hope that it comes about. There are lots of things that I believe to be merely possible that I am indifferent about and plenty that I very much hope will not happen. To be said to hope that something is the case, then I must want it to be the case. To be said to hope that someone achieves something, then I must want the person to achieve whatever is in question. And so on.

This line of thought takes us to the lowest common denominator of analysis. Under this account, I can be said to hope that something is the case, hope that someone is or does something—hope that any such scenario is realized—just so far as I want the scenario to materialize and believe that it is possible but not inevitable that it does materialize: I assign a nonzero, nonunit probability to that desired prospect; I do not despair about it, nor am I complacent about it.

This analysis would equate hope, then, with the belief that some prospect may obtain or may not obtain, where one desires that it does obtain. It would mean that whenever people's beliefs and desires with respect to a given prospect are configured in that pattern, then they can be rightly ascribed the attitude of hope. They can be said to hope that the prospect obtains or to hope in the prospect or to pin their hopes on the prospect or whatever.

I think that this analysis of hope in terms of belief and desire does apply whenever we have a use for the term. It represents a lowest common denominator that is present across the different usages possible. Whether we are considering the prospect of apple pie for dinner or of a heaven after death, we can say that hoping in that prospect always involves the belief that there may or may not be apple pie, or that there may or may not be a heaven, together with the desire that the prospect eventuates.

This analysis would equate hope with a more or less obvious arrangement among the distinct phenomena of belief and desire. In that sense, it would analyze it away, denying it any interest as a phenomenon in its own right. The belief that hope can be defined away in this fashion may explain why hope has received relatively little attention in philosophy. But the analysis misses out on the fact that while the word *hope* is ordinarily used for attitudes that range over an enormous variety of scenarios—personal and impersonal—hope is characterized by a more specific, substantial structure in some central cases. Or so, at any rate, I shall be arguing.

In the cases that I have in mind, hope certainly requires the elements of belief and desire that the analysis captures. But it also requires something else, and it is this extra structure that gives such hope a characteristic identity. The pattern of belief and desire that figures as the lowest common denominator is necessary for hope of this kind to be present in someone. But it is not sufficient. What, then, is the extra structure required? What is the missing *X*-factor or *X*-arrangement? To answer that question, I want to spend some time discussing a phenomenon that parallels hope: that of precaution.

Precaution

Anyone who has ever had work done to a house or apartment will probably have read the advice given to people in that situation about how to deal with proposals from builders (Bratman 1992). The advice is that when you have settled on a bid and agreed on a price with the contractor—say, a price of $100,000—you should assume in all your further planning that the actual building cost to you will be about one-tenth or more as much: $110,000. The advice is not that you should necessarily change your belief about the matter, as if belief were subject to discretionary control. Rather it is that in making all the decisions associated with the renovation—decisions on furnishings, designs, and the like—you should act on the precautionary assumption that you will have to pay the builder $110,000, or something close to it: you should act as if it will cost that amount or as if there is a good chance that it will cost that amount.

The implication of this pattern of advice giving is that you are capable of putting certain of your beliefs offline, as it were, in making your decisions about different courses of action. In particular, you are capable of putting offline the belief—assuming that it is your belief—that the building will cost $100,000 and are able to act as if you had the distinct belief that it will cost $110,000. The lesson is that you are not the slave of the beliefs that are immediately relevant to a decision like this. You are capable of placing yourself at a distance from them and putting yourself under the control of an assumption you may not strictly endorse. You can assume the profile of someone you are not: someone with the cautious belief that the cost will be the higher figure. You may and should do that, so the advice goes, if you want to guard against unforeseen costs.

But what if the advice actually leads you to change your belief about the cost? Will that remove the need for you to act as if the higher costing will obtain or as if there is a good chance it will obtain? Not really, since precaution also guards against a second, related danger: that of going along initially with that cautious belief but then fluctuating in your resolve as the belief waxes and wanes with incoming evidence. Tying yourself to the precautionary assumption will keep you on track—it will reflect the importance of avoiding a cost overrun—in a way that trusting yourself to the revised belief might not. Acting resiliently on the precautionary assumption will ensure that no matter how the evidence comes and goes, you will stick with that assumption and not allow yourself to be blown about by the vagaries of incoming data. Perhaps, things look better this morning as you discover that some material needed in the construction has fallen in price. No matter. So far as you follow the precautionary assumption, you will refuse to let that evidence affect the way in which you act. The assumption is where you stand. Your precise beliefs about the chances of the lower costing's being correct are out of the loop that determines action.

This can all be put a little more perspicuously, if somewhat more academically, with the help of decision theory. According to decision theory, you are bound to act according to, first, the utilities you attach to the various possible outcomes of the

available options and, second, the probabilities you assign to those outcomes materializing in the event of your choosing one or another of the options. Let it be the case that you actually assign a relatively high probability to the extension's costing $100,000 rather than $110,000 and that the rational thing for you to do in light of that assignment is to plan around its costing that amount; planning around that costing maximizes your expected utility. The precautionary advice suggests that notwithstanding these facts, you should act as if something that is not the case were the case: as if you assigned a relatively lower probability to the extension's costing $100,000 rather than $110,000.

[Hope] will guard against the danger of loss of heart where precaution guards against exposure to a catastrophe like a cost overrun.

Does the advice require you to act counterrationally, from the point of view of decision theory? Not necessarily. The advice may remind you just how bad it would be to have a cost overrun and may thereby shock you into increasing whatever degree of disutility you attached to the overrun. Given this shift in your utilities, it may thereby become rational for you to plan around the higher costing, whether or not you change the relatively high probability you attach to the lower costing. Thus, you may be rationally led to authorize the precautionary assumption that the cost will be $110,000 or something close to it. Acting on that precautionary assumption will be the natural way to give effect to the newly kindled aversion for suffering a cost overrun.

But why should you be advised to act as if the renovation will cost $110,000 or as if there is a good chance that it will cost that? Why should the advice not be phrased in decision-theoretic terms instead? If the course of action recommended is rational for the reason just given, then—to take the case where belief does not shift—it will amount decision-theoretically to acting on the basis of having a relatively high subjective probability that the renovation will cost only $100,000 but having a very high disutility for a cost overrun. So why should the advice not be phrased in those terms? Why should you not be told: act on your existing probabilities, but in doing so, allow for the fact that you have a particularly high disutility for a cost overrun?

There are at least two reasons why the original formulation is better than this decision-theoretic counterpart. One is that the formulation in terms of the precautionary assumption gives the agent intelligible, perspicuous guidance about what

to do, whereas the decision-theoretic formulation would not do this. That formulation would be of use, at best, only to someone who already understood decision theory (Pettit and Smith 1990), and it would require a knowledge of one's subjective probabilities and utilities that is normally unavailable (Harman 1986). But apart from offering intelligible, perspicuous advice, the precautionary formulation also presents the agent with a stable reference point by which to navigate. The decision-theoretic formulation would offer a reference point that was hostage to every shift in subjective probability and utility; it would leave the agent at the mercy of evidential ebb and flow.

Substantial Hope

In the case of precaution, there is a prospect that the agent believes may or may not obtain—the cost overrun—and at least after the advice is given, the agent comes to form an intense aversion for this. To avoid the danger of the prospect's materializing, then—the danger of their own action's leaving them unprotected against it—the agent rationally adopts the maxim of acting as if the cost overrun will materialize or as if there is a good chance that it will materialize. That is the best method available of self-protection.

These comments direct us to the shape that a parallel, substantial form of hope might take. When hope of any kind is present, however superficial, then there is a prospect that the agent believes may or may not obtain, but unlike the prospect for which precaution is fitted, this is something that the agent desires to obtain. Hope would take a parallel form to precaution, then, if there were any reason in such a case why the agent should be moved to act as if that desired prospect were going to obtain or as if there were a good chance that it was going to obtain. So can we think of any reason why this might be a rational response: why it might make sense to authorize a hopeful, as distinct from a precautionary assumption?

The reason precaution makes sense is that the level of confidence that the agent has for the feared prospect's materializing is too low to guard against the danger of being unprotected. A reason hope would make parallel sense is that the level of confidence that the agent has for the desired prospect is too low to guard against a danger of some other kind. So what sort of danger might this be?

I see only one serious candidate. This is the danger that the confidence level will be so low that the agent loses heart and ceases to exercise agency effectively. If the agent assigns a relatively low probability to the desired prospect, then that may cause him or her to make no effort to bring it about, thereby ensuring that he or she certainly does not bring it about. And even if the prospect is something that is beyond his or her influence—it may be the prospect of surviving an illness or the prospect of a war's not taking place—such a low-probability assignment can mean that the agent does nothing to bring about other goals that are within his or her reach. In either case, the low level of confidence can induce an emotional collapse and a loss of self-efficacy.

With this claim in place, we can see our way to an account of a sort of hope that parallels precaution and that goes beyond the superficial variety of hope analyzed in the first section. Hope will consist in acting as if a desired prospect is going to obtain or has a good chance of obtaining, just as precaution consists in acting as if this were the case with some feared prospect. It will guard against the danger of loss of heart where precaution guards against exposure to a catastrophe like a cost overrun. And just as acting on the precautionary assumption will secure a benefit even in the case where beliefs adjust appropriately, providing a target that is stable across the ups and downs of evidence, so the hopeful assumption can guard against a second danger and secure a parallel benefit in the case where the agent becomes more optimistic. It can guard the agent against the tidal movements of evidence and against the demoralization produced by such an ebb and flow.

Three elements emerge, then, in the account of substantial as distinct from superficial hope:

1. The agent desires that a certain prospect obtain and believes that it may or may not obtain—these are the conditions for superficial hope—but may do so only at a level of confidence that induces a loss of heart, sapping spirit and effort.
2. The signal danger of this loss of heart prompts the agent to adopt a strategy that consists in acting as if the desired prospect is going to obtain or has a good chance of obtaining.
3. This strategy promises to avoid that danger and secure the related, secondary benefit, relevant even for someone relatively optimistic, of ensuring stability across the ups and downs of evidence.

To hope that something is the case in this sense, as the first clause makes clear, requires that you desire it to be the case and that you do not believe for sure either that it obtains or that it does not obtain. But it is also to act and react as if the prospect were going to obtain or stood a good chance of obtaining. It involves forming attitudes, and performing actions, of the kind that this would make intelligible. And it is to do this, in particular, whether or not subjective probability happens to come in line.

To hope that something is the case or that you can make it the case, then, is to form an overall outlook akin to that which would be appropriate in the event of the hoped-for scenario's being a firm or good prospect. Where the prospect is manifestly beyond your control, it is to sustain a more or less sanguine set of attitudes and to act on other fronts in the way that such attitudes would prompt. And where the prospect is within your sphere of influence—however improbable it is that the influence will be effective—it is to act as if there were also a good chance of making it come out as you wish. It is to embrace an assumption that gives you heart and life and energy. It is to embrace this assumption, furthermore, even if you happen to wax quite optimistic. The assumption will be there to ensure that you are not prey to the vicissitudes of appearance and warrant, now waxing cheerful, now despondent, as the tides of evidence ebb and flow. It will give you a fixity of purpose and outlook amid the flux to which beliefs, in the nature of things, are subject.

Hope in this sense does not come cheap. Certainly, it does not come about just by virtue of desiring the prospect and of not believing for sure that it will or will not

obtain. It requires the active adoption of a particular attitude, a positive piece of mental self-regulation (McGeer and Pettit 2002). To form the hope that something is the case or that I or someone else will manage to make it the case, I have to invest that scenario with a level of confidence that may exceed the confidence of my actual belief in the prospect and with a degree of stability that will certainly exceed the stability of my actual belief. I have to be ready to put that belief offline and to try to organize my responses and my efforts around the assumption that the prospect is firmly on the horizon.

We can usefully compare hope, and indeed precaution, to planning (Bratman 1987). To put a plan in place is to settle on a particular course of action like going to the movies tonight—or perhaps to settle on some general policy or principle of action—and then, absent new evidence, to let that plan dictate what you are going to do, without recourse to further reconsideration. Adopting a plan in this sense can save a lot of decision-making time and can enable you to manage the satisfaction of your desires quite efficiently.

Hope is a cognitive counterpart of planning. Forming an action plan is a way of handling the rough and tumble of desire, silencing any inclination to do something inconsistent with the action. Forming the hope that a particular scenario will eventuate, or at least eventuate in the event of your taking a certain initiative, is a way of handling the hurly burly of belief. It frees you from the bleakness of beliefs that would reduce you to numbed inaction and from the burden of beliefs that wax and wane unpredictably in level of confidence. It gives you firm and friendly coordinates in an uncertain and uncompanionable world. To have hope is to have something we might describe as cognitive resolve.

This account of hope, as it appears in the central cases, is surely plausible. Think of the hope that animated at least some of those who managed to survive the Nazi concentration camps: the hope that kept them from suicide or from just giving in. Or think of the hope displayed by many of those who have to cope with serious disease and who insist on carrying on with their lives, allowing themselves no self-pity and inviting no pity from others. Or think of the hope that can keep a couple struggling to save a relationship, looking beyond recurrent difficulties to the prospect of achieving greater mutual care and commitment. In all such examples, it is surely natural to think of hope as a focused enterprise in which people are willing to stand aside from the beliefs that come most naturally to them and to order their mental and active lives around more galvanizing assumptions: around a cognitive plan.

I trust that this account of substantial hope will prove to be attractive. It makes good sense of why we think that the preservation of hope can be so important, thereby establishing its superiority to the superficial account. It makes hope relatively unmysterious, holding it up as a phenomenon parallel to precaution. It explains the difference between hope and optimism: where hope is an intentionally sustained, essentially avowable response, optimism is a spontaneous, perhaps unconscious habit of belief formation. And as we shall now see, the suggestion embodied in the account that hope is a rational response to at least some circumstances proves capable of vindication.

The Rationality of Hope

It is clear that precaution is often a rational strategy, serving as a sort of insurance policy against catastrophe. But it may not be so clear that hope enjoys the same pragmatic rationale. And even if it does—even if it guards effectively against a real danger—it may not seem to be an attitude that can be sustained in an epistemically rational way, without self-deception.

The first doubt bears on whether hope can be practically rational in the same manner as precaution: whether it can hold out a prospect of answering better to my goals and concerns than a project of exposing myself to the bright light of evidence and fact. Will my goals not be better fulfilled in the case where hope is relevant if I act in a manner suited to how things are rather than to how I might wish them to be? And should I not be rationally disposed, therefore, to be careful in the formation of my beliefs as to how things are and to be punctilious in seeking to organize my behavior around the beliefs that materialize within me?

I think that the answer is that no, rationality does not always support such detached processing of fact in the cases where hope is relevant. What is rational for any one of us to do is what would best promote our goals and concerns, given the kinds of creature we are. But we are creatures of such a feeling, emotional kind that we cannot always serve our goals and concerns well under the image that our beliefs give us of the world we inhabit. Those beliefs may make disaster seem so likely, or they may wobble so uncertainly between the scenarios they hold out as probable, that they leave us in the slough of despondency, unable to act with decision or with any prospect of success. Unrelieved fact processing might do best by our purposes were we creatures that escaped the rule of feeling and emotion like the Mr. Spock character in Star Trek. But we are not creatures of that kind. We are ruled by lymph and gland and brain stem, not just by the computational processing of the cortex, and we are incapable of the detached adjustments to reality that Mr. Spock routinely achieves.

We do not learn of a disease to which we have succumbed, for example, without being swamped by feelings of anxiety and incapacity. We do not experience the loss of someone dear to us without being numbed by grief and anger and desolation. We do not find that our plans are hostage to some alien will or force without suffering failures of confidence and optimism. We rarely face a task of inherent difficulty or uncertainty without experiencing a loss of nerve. When it comes to dealing with the brass tacks of earthly life, we are something of a mess. We see everything, not through a glass darkly but through a glass that hangs in the mists and vapors of a biological mind.

One reason that hope may often be pragmatically rational is that it promises to be able to lift us out of the panics and depressions to which we are naturally prey and to give us firm direction and control. Without hope, there would often be no possibility for us of asserting our agency and of putting our own signature or stamp on our conduct. We would collapse in a heap of despair and uncertainty, beaten down by cascades of inimical fact. Hope in this scenario can be our one salvation as

agents and persons, our only way of remaining capable of seeing ourselves in what we do. Freud's best advertising line for psychoanalysis was, *Wo es war, soll Ich werden*—"where there was an it, there shall be an I." The line might well be applied to hope. In many circumstances, hope represents the only way of retaining our identity and selfhood and of not losing ourselves to the turmoil of brute, disheartening fact.

Where hope is an intentionally sustained, essentially avowable response, optimism is a spontaneous, perhaps unconscious habit of belief formation.

But hope can often possess another aspect of pragmatic rationality. Not only is it capable of giving us self-direction and control, distancing us from the effects of turbulent fact and appearance of fact, it may also offer us the best way of coping with those harsh realities and of finding our way through. It is common lore, however anecdotal in character, that people can cope better with illness, and even show remarkable resistance, so far as they keep their hopes up. And it is certainly common experience that when people do not despair under bad news or in evil times—when they manage to keep their hearts up and press on in positive ways—they often succeed in overcoming obstacles that might otherwise have brought them down. There need be no magic involved here. Many of us will treat a 10 percent chance of success in some venture as a depressing, potentially enervating prospect. And if we do, that may well reduce the chance of success even further. But if we gain heart by the assertion of will involved in putting our hope in success, then we can give success the 10 percent chance it really has. The cognitive resolve that hope brings with it can be our salvation.

So much for the claim that hope, despite appearances, is certainly rational in pragmatic or practical terms; it promises to deliver tangible, human benefits. But what of the charge that even if it has these advantages, still it is evidentially irrational, requiring people to indulge in a sort of self-deception? How telling is this complaint?

The notion of self-deception covers a variety of phenomena. It applies at one extreme to the case—perhaps one of dubious coherence—where I recognize beyond all possible doubt that something is the case but manage to hide that fact from myself. It applies at the other extreme to the case where I realize that exposure to evidence may disturb something that I currently believe but decide not to

seek out that evidence. And it applies, in between, to a range of cases where I am more or less consciously aware of the thrust of the evidence but insulate myself from its effect.

There is no self-deception of any kind involved in hope, not even the innocuous sort that occurs toward the second extreme in this spectrum. For if the account given is correct, those who embrace hope need not indulge in any illusion or delusion about how things are. True, they set themselves to act and react as if things were otherwise than the evidence suggests they are or as if they were more firmly established than the evidence shows. But people can do this quite openly and honestly, being prepared to admit to themselves and others that for very good, pragmatic reasons—all the reasons that argue for cognitive resolve—they are refusing to expose themselves to the low or unstable tide of evidence; for current practical purposes, they are investing their confidence in a firmer, more encouraging prospect. They can be as undeceived as I am when I say to myself that my builder is reliable and will be able to do the job at the tendered cost, but then proceed to act as if that were not so. There is an element of make-believe in hope, as there is in this sort of caution, but make-believe does not amount to self-deception.

Hope, it is true, will display some facets that are reminiscent of self-deception. If I set out to act on a certain hope, for example, I may tell you that I do not want you to take me through this or that litany of evidence and fact. I may recognize that the hope around which I am organizing my attitudes and actions is a frail reed that needs nurturing and that it may not survive your recitation. But in recognizing that this is so, and in refusing to listen to the full recital of presumptive evidence, I do not tell myself a lie. I can be utterly undeceived about what I am doing.

Hope promises, then, to be both a practically rational and an evidentially rational—or at least evidentially not irrational—project for someone to undertake. Not only does hope in my sense have a characteristic identity or gestalt as a phenomenon of mind, it is a phenomenon that all of us may rationally want to be able to display under various circumstances. It is likely to represent a sensible and avowable response to the adversity that life puts in our path.

One final point. In discussing the rationality of hope, I have often spoken of someone's rationally adopting a hopeful disposition as if the response were consciously and carefully reasoned. But a rational response remains rational, whether or not it is taken up in an explicit use of reason. And so I should add that the argument that hope is rational demonstrates not just that strategic agents are rational in opting for hope but that the spontaneous will to hope that is endemic to our species may often be entirely rational too. Whether hope is sourced in the emotions and aspirations of the heart or in the reasoned reflections of the head, it remains a potentially rational attitude to adopt.

The Ubiquity of Hope

Still, for all that I have said so far, hope may be something that has merely marginal significance in our affairs. Perhaps, it is only needed on an occasional basis as a protection against particularly harsh realities; perhaps, it does not figure much in the regular course of things. But to think this, I want to say finally, would be a mistake. Hope in the sense that concerns us here is required across a large range of situations. It shows up in the most unlikely places.

I suggested that there are two ways in which our beliefs—our evidentially sensitive image of the world—may let us down, leaving us in the slough of despond and unable to cope. They may make relief from a prospect of adversity seem so unlikely as to deprive us of resources for reacting in a positive, potentially productive way. Or they may wobble so wildly in the probability they assign to relief, being sensitive to every perturbation of evidence, that they have a similar incapacitating effect. Hope offers an escape from both problems, giving us a supportive and stable image around which to organize our feelings and actions—giving us cognitive resolve.

The two problems from which hope gives us an escape in this way are endemic in human affairs; for that reason, hope is needed on many different fronts. There are numerous areas of action where the prospects on which we must count in launching successful efforts are not as supportive or stable as we need, and to rescue ourselves from inertia or despair in these areas, we have to rely on the capacity of hope to carry us through. I look briefly at the contexts of collective action and interpersonal recognition, both central to human life, to make this ubiquity claim plausible.

Consider the case where we are involved in collective action with others as members of a group that has a brief to discharge. For us each to be motivated to do our bit, we will have to feel relatively secure that that contribution will be matched by contributions on the part of others and that the contributions promise, in the aggregate, to deliver the results desired by the group. But where are we going to find a base for that security of expectation? Hardly in the uncertain whirl of belief, sensitive as it is to every twist of evidence and to every doubt about how others are disposed to behave, about how others think we are disposed to behave, and so on.

We typically escape from the predicament of such collective uncertainty and doubt, I suggest, by each going along with a group-level version of cognitive resolve. We make a ceremony of each agreeing to act as if it were the case that others will act in corresponding ways and as if the overall effect of our concerted action will be to bring about a certain desired result. We make a ceremony of each organizing our efforts around that assumption, keeping the assumption safe from minute by minute doubt. And to do this, in my terms, is nothing short of making it a matter of common awareness that each member of the group will be animated by the required hope and will act appropriately; everyone believes that this is so, believes that everyone believes that this is so, and so on. Where we might have had doubts about what each believes, we can be well positioned to see evidence in the ceremony described of each committing ourselves to the hope required.

Collective groups often unravel, of course, as we are too well aware. But what typically fails, leading to their dissolution, is precisely an endorsement of the sort of hope I have in mind. Individuals will peel away from that working, galvanizing assumption about the availability of their different contributions and about the aggregate effect that those contributions will have. They will each sink back into their own private, unstable, and typically, not very sanguine beliefs. Or they will come to believe that others have lost hope in that way, or that others have ceased to believe that they retain that hope, or whatever. They will lose a grip on the only factor that might have kept them together.

Hope is needed not only in collective endeavors. It is also required in establishing the sorts of relationships in which we recognize and respect one another as persons—in which we have our status as persons confirmed. The relationships that do this for us are the discourse-friendly connections within which we each abjure recourse to force or manipulation, coercion or deception, and treat one another as subjects with whom we can talk productively, reasoning together about what one of us should say or think or about what we should say or think in combination (Pettit 2001). Just as collective action requires the capacity for hope, so the mutual acquisition of status within such a relationship is premised on the availability of hope too.

To reason with one another, each of us must have the capacity to adjudicate the reasons we offer one another and the capacity to adjust and act as any reasons we accept require of us. To enjoy the status of a person among others—the status of a conversable, reason-capable subject—then we must each ascribe the capacity to track reasons to others, and we must each be able to expect that others will ascribe that capacity to us. But now the question is, What basis can we have for this ascription or expectation?

As in the collective case, I see little possibility that any one of us can rely on the resources of our own evidence and belief for access to this assurance. For we are each aware that we human beings often adjust our beliefs and act in a way that does not exercise the capacity to track relevant reasons. Why should any one of us ascribe that capacity to others even as we see them fail to go with the reasons? Why should we think that although they went wrong in this or that case—though they made an error of calculation or observation or displayed a certain inconstancy of will—still they could always have done otherwise; they had the capacity all along to go with the reasons, and it was only a contingent limitation or obstacle that caused the failure? And why should we expect that others, finding similar failures in us, will continue to ascribe to us the capacity to go with the reasons—the capacity to do otherwise—and to treat us in the corresponding manner?

I see no possible base for our seeing others as possessed of the relevant capacity other than that which hope would provide. And I see no ground for any one of us to expect to be robustly ascribed that capacity other than that which a belief that others invest a similar hope in us would provide. We each act, as a matter of common awareness, as if the others with whom we routinely deal have the capacity, aspiring to find in them creatures with whom it is possible to reason and to make society; we do this through the thick and thin of failure, always refusing to let the evidence of failure dent our confidence. But this, in my terms, is just to say that we are each

committed as a matter of common awareness to the hope—sustained up to the very threshold of ascribing madness or mania—that others will always prove conversable in that way. We make it a matter of commonly recognized, cognitive resolve that others are capable of reasoning effectively with us and that they each have the status of a person among persons.

These two contexts are meant to suggest that though we do not often talk of hope in relation to them, still hope, as I have presented it in this article, plays a crucial role in each. Since the contexts involve areas of action and interaction that are right at the center of human concerns, I think that they serve well in support of my final claim. Not only is substantial hope a rational enterprise, as argued in the previous section, it is also an enterprise that has a significant place in our dealings with one another; it comes close to being ubiquitous in human life.

Conclusion

We saw in the first section that hope is of little interest if it is equated with a desire for something that one believes may obtain or may not obtain. Drawing on a discussion of precaution in the second section, I argued in the third that in certain central cases, such superficial hope becomes a substantial phenomenon, involving the extra feature of acting as if a certain animating assumption held true: acting, if you like, with a certain cognitive resolve.

Is such substantial hope a potentially rational state of mind to nurture and sustain? I tried to show in the fourth section that it is. It enables the subject to escape the grip of beliefs that are so bleak or so unstable that they reduce a subject to a helpless status. It provides the agent with direction and control and makes success in the face of adversity much more probable that it would otherwise have been. And it does this, moreover, without forcing the subject into any sort of self-deception.

Is such substantial, rational hope of marginal or central significance in human life? I suggested in the final section that it is ubiquitous in our dealings with one another, being present beyond the range of instances where we readily recognize its importance. A little analysis suggests that it is crucial both to the collective action that we undertake for shared ends and to the practice of interpersonal recognition in which we each attain the status of a person among persons.

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