Hope as a Political Virtue

Darrel Moellendorf

Abstract: In this paper I argue that hope is best understood as a compound psychological state. When we take hope according to the details of this account, we are in a good position to understand why it is a political virtue of persons. I also argue that securing the institutional bases of hope is a virtue of state institutions, particularly in states in transition from severe injustice. And, finally, when the bases are secure, a person who fails to hope for the political future is in that regard *prima facie* blameworthy.

The resources of the state have to be deployed imaginatively, wisely, efficiently and equitably, to facilitate the reconstruction process in a manner which best brings relief and hope to the widest section of the community, developing for the benefit of the entire nation the latent human potential and resources of every person who has directly or indirectly been burdened with the heritage of the shame and the pain of our racist past.

—Justice Ismail Mahomed

Faith and hope imply and element of imperfection, since faith is of things unseen, and hope of things not yet possessed.

—St. Thomas Aquinas

I

Hoping is imaginative activity. The person who hopes looks beyond her present circumstances to a better future, and adjusts her plans and expectations to this ‘not yet possessed’ condition. Hope features


3 An earlier version of this paper was presented to the Philosophy Department at Rhodes University. I would like to thank those who discussed it with me on that occasion for helping me to clarify my thinking. I would like to thank Thad Metz and Paul Voice for comments on earlier drafts.
prominently in our lives in religious and medical contexts, but also in political contexts, most obviously where persons imagine more just arrangements and participate in efforts to bring them about. Hope also plays a less obvious role in the political lives of persons, when as a result of its motivating capacity persons come to see themselves as capable of autonomous action and deserving of political arrangements respecting such autonomy, even if such arrangements exists only as imagined possibilities. Additionally, as Justice Mahomed suggests in the quotation above, a person’s willingness to pledge allegiance to a society marred by injustice properly depends upon whether, and to what extent, the institutions of that society provide her with reasons to hope that the imagined more just future society can be achieved by means of legitimate political action.

Hope has not received much attention from political philosophers despite what I assert in the opening paragraph to be its political importance.\(^4\) It might be natural to suspect then that my assertions are exaggerated. I shall argue in this paper that they are not. I shall present an account of hope that demonstrates that it is virtuous activity of the imagination in political life, especially in circumstances in which justice is lacking. This requires an account of the kind of psychological state that hope is. I shall argue that it is best understood as a compound state. When we take hope according to the details of this account, we are in a good position to understand why it is a political virtue of persons. I shall also argue that the securing the institutional bases of hope is a virtue of state institutions, particularly in states in transition from severe injustice. And, finally, when the bases are secure, a person who fails to hope for the political future is in that regard \textit{prima facie} blameworthy.

\(^4\) There are exceptions, of course, including Richard Rorty’s \textit{Philosophy and Social Hope} (London: Penguin, 1999), the last chapter of my \textit{Cosmopolitan Justice} (Boulder: Westview Press, 2002), and Catriona McKinnon’s ‘Cosmopolitan Hope,’ in Gillian Brock and Harry Brighouse, eds. \textit{The Political Philosophy of Cosmopolitanism} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 234-249. Each of these, however, is directed to somewhat different aspects of hope than the present essay.
II

Hope plays an important role in Kant’s practical philosophy, justifying action and thereby sustaining agents. According to Kant, hope comprises the conclusion of an inference that employs a premise about what ought to be the case and another stating the ought-implies-can principle.5 Kant takes the judgment that autonomous moral action is possible for agents to be based upon the ‘credential’ of morality.6 Insofar as we take our moral duties seriously, we must believe that it is possible to fulfill them. Taking morality seriously provides reason to hope that we are capable of acting autonomously to fulfill our moral duties. Additionally, Kant can appeal to arguments, deriving from his theoretical philosophy that the objects of hope are not ruled out by the limits of theoretical knowledge.

I shall lift two salient features of Kant’s account of hope out of his practical philosophy and the conceptual scheme of transcendental idealism. The Kantian account takes hope to be a compound psychological state consisting in, at least, (1) a belief about the possibility of a state of affairs and (2) a pro-attitude that such a state of affairs should come to exist. I shall often use the term desire for that pro-attitude, but that is not meant to rule out in principle what Kant calls respect, which he takes to motivate moral action. I shall call accounts of hope that employ these two elements compound accounts.

A virtue of compound accounts is their parsimony. They are consistent with what John McDowell calls ‘eighteenth-century philosophy of mind,’ which ‘insists on a strict separation between cognitive capacities and their exercise, on the one hand, and what eighteenth-century writers would classify as passions or sentiments, on the other.’7 A compound


account does not require invoking a new simple psychological state; rather it takes hope as a particular sort of combination of belief and desire.

Beliefs are essentially related to the truth-value of propositions. A belief is false just in case the proposition that it affirms is false. Desires are not essentially related to the truth-value of propositions. Indeed, it makes little sense to speak of desires as false, although we may speak of them as bad, imprudent, or inauthentic. Desires are pro-attitudes directed towards attractive features of actual and imaginary states of affairs. According to compound accounts, hope would seem to be both truth and goodness sensitive. But a problem for such accounts is that hope does not consistently obey the rules of either belief or desire.

There seem to be states of affairs that we desire, but that we dare not hope for because of the disappointment that such hope might produce should the states not come to pass.8 Hope, then, is not simply a function of the attractiveness of a state of affairs. Call this hope’s relative sensitivity to disappointment. Compound accounts can seek to absorb this anomaly by maintaining that hope comprises not only desire, but also probabilistic beliefs, and is therefore sensitive to probabilities in a way that mere desires are not. One might then expect hope to be sensitive to truth and probabilities in the way that belief is.

Hope is certainly truth sensitive. There is a range of probability that is relevant to assessing a hope. Hope in what is impossible to realize is false hope. Hope seems closest in character to a particular subset of beliefs, namely beliefs about the future, including predictions and imagined possibilities. But although the presence of doubt is destructive of belief, it is not destructive of hope. Indeed, we would not hope for that which we were confident would be or is the case. Akratic belief may be impossible but it is certainly possible for us to hope for outcomes that

---

we find doubtful.\textsuperscript{9} Not only is this possible but within some (unspecified) range of improbability, such hope does not seem at all unreasonable. So, the sensitivity of hope to the truth is not well-fitted to belief’s sensitivity to truth. Call this hope’s \textit{relative tolerance of doubt}.

Hope then appears to be more sensitive to the likelihood of outcomes than is desire and less sensitive to doubt about states affairs than is belief. Perhaps this can be explained by the interaction of belief and desire. Alternatively, one might think that these anomalies count against compound accounts and in favor of taking hope as a simple, rather than compound, psychological state. In ethics there has been some discussion of the possibility of simple states, neither beliefs nor desires, but sometimes called \textit{besires}.$^{10}$ Besires, if there be such, are both cognitive and motivational. If hope were a simple psychological it would be a good candidate for some sort of desire since hope at least partially tracks the truth and is motivational. I shall call accounts of hope that postulate such a simple state \textit{simple accounts}.

At one point McDowell accounts for cruelty of a certain kind as a failure to see or understand what the circumstances mean, which failure also obscures the reason not to act in a morally sensitive or virtuous manner.$^{11}$ The cruel person fails to sees the situation as it really is, but this same failure is also a dispositional failure. A virtue of this account is that it allows one to say of the judgment ‘cruelty is wrong’ that it is true and that the affirmation of it is motivational. A problem that has pre-occupied many philosophers of moral judgment is to account for both the apparent cognitive and motivational characteristics of such

\textsuperscript{9} The impossibility of akatic belief seems at least to be the orthodoxy on these matters. See, for example, Gary Watson, ‘The Work of the Will’ in his \textit{Agency and Answerability} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 146-149.


judgments. Postulating the existence of desires has the virtue of providing a psychological foundation for solving this problem.

For hope, a central problem has less to do with giving an account of a judgment of a certain sort, but more to do with understanding how the person in possession of hope is in a psychological state that is both sensitive to truth and dispositive toward action. In assessing simple accounts of hope, the central issue is whether an additional simple psychological state is an explanatory necessity. It is, only if compound accounts cannot account for the hope’s relative sensitivity to disappointment and tolerance of doubt.

Compound accounts must take the rules of reasonable hope as partially the product of the likelihood and normative importance of the object of hope. Kant’s own account of the conditions of the possibility of action required by practical reason is instructive as a limit case. The ideals of practical reason, namely the existence of freedom, immortality, and God, are bare possibilities, in the sense of not inconsistent—according to transcendental idealism—with the claims of theoretical reason. But, according to Kant, because it is only in virtue of these that it is possible to do that which practical reason requires, hope in them is reasonable. Kant refers to these as *postulates of practical reason* because he believes that we cannot make sense of ourselves as moral agents without assuming them. What one does not have good reason to believe, one may nonetheless hope for, in light of the fundamental normative importance of the object. These are, for Kant, the highest objects of hope, but those that have the least support of probability. The more generalizable point is that reasonable hope can be maintained even in the face of doubts about likelihood, if the normative importance of the object is strong enough and the doubts not severe enough. One’s hope for the victory of a political cause, for example, may be strong despite one’s estimation that the odds are low.

---

12 This at least is the interpretation that I offer of Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:120-122, and 237-238.
There might be a temptation then to view the norms of reasonable hope as something like a calculation of estimated utility. Even where the chances are slim if the outcome is sufficiently desirable or normatively important, it is reasonable to hope for the end. But this is not correct. Hope diverges from belief in its relative tolerance of doubt but also from desire in its sensitivity to disappointment. Now, both are cases of the conjunction of low probability with desirable outcomes. Why then is hope tolerant of doubt but sensitive to disappointment?

The relative sensitivity of hope to disappointment is not well accounted for on the analogy to expected utilities since the fading of the hope may occur without the diminishing attractiveness of the goal. Take the following two cases:

*Case 1:* A political activist after long years of engagement in struggles to promote a more just society loses her enthusiasm for the effort. When asked if she believes that a more just order is possible she truthfully proclaims ‘Yes, as much as I ever thought so.’ When asked if she still believes in the justice of the cause she truthfully answers, ‘Yes, as much as ever.’ When asked why she has given up her activism she simply says that she is no longer stirred to action by the speeches of her comrades, that she is weary.

*Case 2:* The wife of a political prisoner, who has spent several years in jail with no stated release date, finally stops imagining the life that they will share upon his release. Her estimation about when and if he will be released has not changed. Her desire that he be released has not changed. But his release is no longer something that she plans on.

Both cases can, I believe, be thought of as cases of demoralization or loss of hope. I think that the psychological states of the two characters in both are entirely imaginable and not hard to understand. What is somewhat puzzling about these cases is that although the relevant beliefs and desires remain constant the role of these in the persons’ practical lives has changed. The belief-desire combinations are no longer
sufficient to motivate action, either actual or imagined. These, I take it, are examples of hope’s relative sensitivity to disappointment.

Now, if hope’s relative sensitivity to disappointment is a puzzle for compound accounts, simple accounts are not well-positioned to capitalize on this. Since the point of the desire hypothesis is to capture the motivating property of desires in a state that is also cognitive. If, as these examples suggest, desires are not necessarily motivating, then whatever the simple state would be that would capture cognition and motivation, it is not a desire. So, we are without an account of hope that takes it as is motivating. These two cases constitute a puzzle for both accounts and not necessarily a reason to abandon the compound account.

These cases point out that non-confident belief and desire are insufficient for hope since neither the belief nor the desires changed, but the hope diminished. The difference between the persons when they possessed hope and when they did not is that the hopeful person took her beliefs and desires as reasons for action, whereas the resigned or demoralized one does not. Objects of hope seem to be capable of being of several sorts, but they are essentially related to agency. In the cases that Kant discusses, the objects of hope justify or make intelligible moral life. These are exceptional, and controversial, cases. More commonly, as in the two cases above, the objects of hope are either goals towards which one contributes in one’s actions, or more minimally states of affairs the realization of which one makes provision for in one’s plans. In either case hope is essentially practical. The hopeful person’s attitude necessarily includes motivation.

The taking one’s beliefs and desires as reasons for action is a necessary condition of hoping. A person who fails to do so, as the examples above illustrate, fails to hope. I shall call this aspect of hope the practical aspect of hope. Without the practical aspect of hope, a person may wish for an outcome, but she does not hope for it. Compound accounts can then explain the anomalies of hope in comparison to belief by taking hope as sustainable in the light of doubts because of the normative
importance of the object of hope. Moreover, they can explain hope’s
divergence from desire by taking hope as sensitive to disappointment
because of hope’s practical aspect. In light of their relative parsimony,
then, compound accounts have advantages over simple accounts.

Now of course demoralization might be the product of a changed
assessment of probabilities or a changed attitude towards the normative
importance of the object of hope (but the two examples above show that
these are not necessary to produce demoralization). For example, the
incorporation of objects of hope into an agent’s plans might have high
opportunity costs. The more that one has to sacrifice to realize the hope,
the harder that it can be to maintain the hope. Counter-insurgency
warfare sometime kills more than insurgents; hope among would-be
rebels can die as well. In these situations, it is not that a different
political order becomes unattractive, rather there no longer seems to be
sufficient reason—in light of the risks—to develop plans of action
around the new order. Or, sometimes the opportunity costs may be
entirely psychological. The mental energy and time that it takes to
maintain a set of plans can seem prohibitive in light of diminished
probabilities. Additionally, people tend to discount future goods. A loss
of hope can occur when the normative importance of the object exerts
less pull than it had previously because a person’s future discount rate
increases.

Could a person, who believes, but without full confidence, that an
outcome is possible, who desires it, and whose plans for acting are in
some way sensitive to it nonetheless fail to hope for it? When one surveys
the possible alternative psychological states that the person might be in
this seems doubtful. The person does not merely believe that the state of
affairs is possible; she is not simply predicting it or imagining it. Nor is
she merely desiring it or wishing for it. There appears to be no plausible
alternative to claiming that she is hoping for it. The three conditions
seem then to be sufficient for hoping.
III
In light the foregoing discussion of demoralization it has seemed necessary to augment the compound account of hope. A person hopes for X if and only if (1) she non-confidently believes that X is possible, (2) she takes X as possessing normative significance, and (3) the combination of elements (1) and (2) are sufficient for her to incorporate the existence of X into her plans for acting.

Luc Bovens has recently defended a compound account of hope. He argues that hope comprises (A) a non-confident belief that a state of affairs will come about, (B) a desire that it will come about, and (C) some amount of mental imaging concerning what it would be like should such a state of affairs come about. In defending (C) he uses the example of Sophie who shows up late to a party and ‘asks me very self-confidently whether I had been hoping that she would come.’ We are to assume that he believed that she might come and had considered her a welcome guest. But these alone, Bovens maintains, are insufficient for him having hoped that she would come. This would require in addition having ‘devoted at least some mental energy to the question whether she would or would not come to the party …’ This is the third element of Bovens’s account.

Bovens, I think is correct in concluding that the likelihood that Sophie might come and the (apparently weak) desire that she would are insufficient for hoping that she would. But while the addition of mental imaging seems to add to the person’s commitment to the object of hope, it does not distinguish hoping from mere wishing. It is important to this distinction that wishing in relation to hoping is relatively passive. This speaks in favor of the practical aspect of hope over mental imaging as hope’s third condition.

The practical aspect of hope has ramifications for understanding the value of hope. Bovens takes hope as instrumentally valuable in enabling

---

13 Bovens, ‘Hope,’ 674.
14 Ibid.
us to carry out tasks to completion.\textsuperscript{15} Indeed paradigmatically hope sustains agents in projects in the face of danger or slim odds. As Bovens recognizes, the value of this is not only instrumental to the realization of the goods associated with those projects. A sense of one’s ability to realize important projects is partially constitutive of one’s self-respect. A person devoid of hope will not have such a sense. So, hope can facilitate the development of self-respect or what Bovens calls a sense of self-worth.\textsuperscript{16} Persons without hope in their abilities and capacity to maintain commitments cannot sustain the attitudes necessary for successful action, which is the basis of self-respect. Insofar as this view takes hope as contributing to self-respecting agency, it is a broadly Kantian view of the value of hope.

Although Bovens takes this Kantian view, his own analysis cannot readily capture it. He would seem to have to rely on the extent to which hope involves desire in order to account for its motivational capacity. But, as I argued in the previous section, this is insufficient. Those who lose hope do not necessarily lose a desire for the outcome. Moreover, a person may wish for an outcome without actively pursuing it; she might desire it quite intensely but be unable or unwilling to develop plans that are at all sensitive to its coming to pass. The value of hope as instrumental to goods, which hopeful action pursues, and as contributing to self-respect is better captured by an analysis that includes hope’s practical aspect. The hopeful agent makes her life plans sensitive to the objects of her hope. It is in virtue of doing this that she might be successful in the pursuit of those objects and therefore enjoy whatever value the objects possess and grow in respect for her own abilities to pursue her plans and goals.

Hope can now be seen as political virtue in two senses. First, insofar as the pursuit of societies with just institutions often involves forms of political activity that are uncertain and dangerous, a hopeful attitude is

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 671.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 677-678.
instrumentally valuable in such pursuits. Second, hope contributes to the
development of a person’s confidence in her abilities to realize
important projects, which is partially constitutive of one’s self-respect.
And self-respect underlies the attitude that one is entitled to just political
institutions. Hope, then, may both serve to motivate important political
activity and serve to develop the attitudes that the political goals are
important.

The second sense in which hope is a virtue is less obvious than the
first and could benefit from more careful exposition. Consider the
following argument: (1) Self-respect comprises confidence in one’s ability
and willingness to realize important projects. (2) Hope contributes to the
development and maintenance of the confidence of agents by sustaining
them in the face of uncertainty. (3) Such confidence is a characteristic of
persons who take themselves to be entitled to just political institutions.
Therefore, (4) hope contributes to a person’s attitude that she is entitled
to just political institutions.

The first premise is a familiar piece of John Rawls’s political
philosophy, and has received a great deal of attention since the
publication of *A Theory of Justice*. I have nothing original to add here to
the discussion surrounding it, but its explication is useful for making my
position clear. The second premise is central to present concerns and
requires support. The third premise involves an account of the
relationship between self-respect and a sense of entitlement to just
political institutions.

Rawls takes self-respect to have two aspects. The first is ‘a person’s
sense of his own value, his secure conviction that his conception of his
good, his plan of life, is worth pursuing.’17 The second is ‘a confidence in
one’s abilities, so far as it is within one’s power, to fulfill one’s
intention.’18 This second aspect of self-respect is at work in the first
premise of the above argument. In defending confidence in one’s

1999), 386.
abilities as constitutive of self-respect, Rawls maintains that if a person is 'plagued by failure and self-doubt' she cannot continue in her endeavors. My formulation of the first premise differs slightly from Rawls's second aspect with the addition of confidence in one's willingness. This is a confidence not in one's physical and mental abilities, but in one's moral character. Without this confidence, self-doubt would also jeopardize the realization of one's projects. The irredeemably akratic agent cannot count on herself to pursue what she takes to be all-things-considered important.

Confidence in one's ability and willingness to realize important projects is typically an achievement, sometimes a fragile one, which comes to exist as the result of successfully pursuing important but uncertain projects. Hope can sustain persons in such pursuits by constituting a reason for acting when confidence is weak. Hope then contributes to self-respect, not constitutively, but genetically. It is a virtue of self-respecting agents insofar as the attitude of confidence that constitutes self-respect is acquired by agents who are hopeful.

I assume that just political and social institutions are broadly liberal. They provide the basis and the protection for persons to develop their capabilities and pursue autonomously their reasonable conceptions of the good. Persons who lack confidence in their ability and willingness to realize what they take to be important will have little reason to demand such institutions. By motivating action that develops the requisite confidence, hope contributes to the psychology of persons who are willing and able to demand the social and political framework required for persons generally to live in a manner that expresses their own conceptions of the good.

IV
I have been discussing hope as a virtue of persons, but the provision of the institutional bases of hope may also be a virtue of states. The

19 Ibid.
quotation by Justice Mahomed that appears at the beginning of this paper suggests this. Hope can sustain persons during the political process of the construction of a more just order. In this capacity, hope would appear to be an especially important transitional value. If citizens can be reasonably expected to endure injustices in an institutional arrangement, it is only because the institutional arrangement provides good reasons to hope for a more just future. Institutional arrangements that fail to provide justice cannot be reasonably endorsed unless they at least provide the basis for hope that just institutions can be progressively advanced by legitimate means of political activity. Hope of this sort is a requirement of societal reconciliation to the extent that justice is lacking. The provision of the institutional bases of hope provides appropriate reasons for persons to endorse a partially unjust social arrangement.

I have discussed the sort of endorsement that is required by reconciliation at some length elsewhere.²⁰ So, here I shall only summarize the ideas briefly. Reconciliation requires, among other things, a kind of comparative endorsement of social arrangements. A person comparatively endorses a state of affairs if and only if she would choose it over another. People who comparatively endorse social relations accept them as better than certain alternatives. It might be reasonable to endorse a partially unjust social arrangement in comparison to others for a number of reasons. The arrangement might provide a foundation for the legitimate pursuit of a more just order; it might be the limit of what is feasible in the circumstances; or, the remaining injustices might not be great. For the purposes of assessing whether reasonable bases for hope exist within an institutional arrangement, the first of these reasons is the most significant since it is a forward looking consideration.

What must social institutions provide and protect in order to contain the bases for hoping that they provide the foundation for the legitimate

---

pursuit of a more just order? The minimum would seem to be that the institutions allow for (1) the full discussion of existing injustice, (2) the organization of political campaigns or parties that can address the injustices without fear of reprisal, and (3) through the workings of the political structures, the basis for a reasonable belief that discussion and political mobilization around such issues can yield progress. The first requirement would seem to involve freedom of speech and press. The second would seem to mandate these as well, but freedom of association, demonstration, and movement in addition. The first two requirements, then, seem to stipulate a minimally liberal political framework.

The third requirement is less easily clarified. It requires a legislative process that is open to popular influence, but what exactly that involves cannot be stated with any precision because there might be many different kinds of open arrangements. Rawls, for example, imagines the possibility of ‘decent hierarchical societies’ that allow for consultative processes that are distinct from democratic deliberation and legislation.21 Perhaps there could be such processes that would allow for sufficient openness to popular influence. Moreover, similar institutional arrangements might differ dramatically in their openness depending upon historical and cultural contexts. For example, the openness of democratic institutions to popular influence depends in part on the ability of privileged classes and corporate influences to limit legislative outcomes. Whether or not, then existing social arrangements provide the basis for a reasonable belief that discussion and political mobilization can yield progress, and therefore the basis for the sort of comparative endorsement that hope requires, will typically involve a judgment that is highly sensitive to empirical considerations.

There might be grounds for an additional requirement for the institutional bases of hope under conditions of partially unjust institutions, namely that (4) the need for the progressive realization of

---

just institutions be publicly acknowledged by officials, as for example Justice Mahomed acknowledges in the opening quotation. There can be little doubt that such acknowledgement would be contributory to the institutional bases of hope. But it might be doubted that it is required. In order to make headway with respect to this issue the practical stakes need to be clearer. If the practical upshot of the claim that an institutional arrangement provides the institutional bases is that citizens are obliged to obey the rules of that arrangement and work through legitimate means for the advancement of justice, then it seems reasonable to judge that the requirements of the institutional bases of hope should be relatively strong. For otherwise persons are asked to endure injustice with little reason to believe that their long-suffering will ever end.

I framed the discussion at the beginning of this section as one about the institutional arrangement that persons can be reasonably expected to endorse even if it contains injustices, and I have discussed the institutional bases of hope in relation to that expectation. One need not discuss hope in relation to when a polity can demand allegiance. But there are political reasons that make such a discussion pertinent, namely the pressing question of when societies that are in transition from past severe injustice, but that continue to contain injustices in their institutional arrangements, can reasonably expect the allegiance of their citizens. Insofar as the requirements of the institutional bases of hope are under discussion for the purposes of addressing this question, it seems appropriate that the requirements be more stringent than the three items defended thus far. In the absence of something like requirement (4) persons would be asked to accept both an institutional order and leadership that fails to express any regret about existing injustices.

However, even a social order that can reasonably expect the allegiance of its citizens must allow room for political disagreement and therefore for the possibility legislative outcomes will be unjust. So, the leadership of a transitional society cannot be expected to recognize publicly the need for progressively removing all classes of injustices. The
question is, then, for what classes of injustice does requirement (4) apply? It would seem most appropriate if the political and legal framework, despite realizing conditions (1)-(3), failed to ensure the constitutional basis of equal citizenship through formal equality of rights, liberties, and protections under the law. In the absence both of such equality and public acknowledgement on the part of political leaders that the inequalities must be remedied, it would be unreasonable to expect persons to pursue the progressive realization of justice only through legitimate means, if illegitimate means could be reasonably expected to yield successes. For this would be to require persons to play by the officially unchallenged rules of an order that explicitly expresses contempt for them as equals.

The argument of this section relies on a distinction between the psychological state of hope and its bases in institutions and policies. This distinction is worth emphasizing in order to deflect a criticism along the following lines: Hope cannot possibly be the object of policy because the etiology of any particular person’s hope or lack there of is incredibly complex and uncertain. Moreover for reasons such as those that Rawls discusses under the burdens of judgment there is likely to be much disagreement about whether circumstances warrant hope and in what one should hope.22 Institutions, therefore, cannot be criticized if citizens are not hopeful.

This criticism fails to distinguish between hope as a psychological state, as for example analyzed in sections II and III, and its bases in institutions and policies as discussed in the present section. Hopes as psychological states can be systematically promoted or undermined by social institutions. For example, the racist institutions of apartheid South Africa failed to provide the institutional bases of hope for the majority of South Africans. But, as we know well, institutions such as these can be the object of conscious social change. It is no objection to the argument

above then that the psychological state of hope cannot be the object of social policy, for the argument is directed to the institutional bases of hope, not the psychological state itself.

V

Consideration of the political affairs of transitional societies also raises a question about the nature of hope as a political virtue of persons. To what extent is a hopeful attitude about progress towards justice a virtue of citizens in such societies? Several background matters need to be clarified in order to address this question. First of all, I assume that it is the case for virtues in general, that for each there is at least one vice that corresponds to it such that the person that possesses the vice is \textit{prima facie} morally blameworthy. Second, I assume that a virtue of a good citizen is a characteristic the possession of which contributes to the person acting well in her capacity as a member of a polity. Third, by \textit{transitional society} I mean a society that is publicly committed to pursuing reconciliation and justice after a history of severe injustice. I limit the discussion to those transitional societies that provide the institutional bases for hope discussed in the previous section. So, the question asked above could be rephrased more precisely as follows: Is hope a property such that the failure to possess it renders a person \textit{prima facie} morally blameworthy because of her activities in regards to the polity of which she is a member, which polity is publicly committed to the pursuit of justice and reconciliation after a history of severe injustice? I trust that it is obvious why I prefer the initial formulation of the question.

To answer the question at hand we must consider what it is to be acting well as a citizen of a transitional society. The good citizen is one who is committed to this transition. She possesses, then, both forward looking and backward looking attitudes and judgments and she is disposed towards some kinds of activity that support the transition process because they promote the transition. I take these to include judging that the transitional order is morally superior to the previous one, defending one’s conviction that the transitional order is morally
superior to the previous one in discussions with one’s fellow citizens, maintaining an attitude that the goals of the transition are morally correct, and supporting those goals in discussion with one’s fellow citizens and in formal political activities, such as voting.

Hope is particularly relevant to the forward looking attitudes and judgment insofar as the object of one’s hope is imagined and uncertain. As I have analyzed it, the psychological state of hope requires that one believe that a state of affairs is possible, that one take it to be normatively important, and that one be willing to adjust one’s plans of action in light of those beliefs and attitudes. Now, hope for a more just future would require that a person believed such an institutional arrangement is possible, that she normatively endorsed it, and that she adjusted her plans of action to the realization of it. One endorses a political ideal by promoting it either in discussions with others or at the ballot box. The person who loses hope in the political ideal will see no point in engaging in activities that even minimally promote it. Insofar as hope is practical, the hopeful citizen at least minimally promotes the political ideals for which she hopes.

But is a person who is politically resigned or demoralized \textit{prima facie} morally blameworthy? Recall that we are limiting the discussion to the context of transitional societies that provide the institutional bases for hope for a more just arrangement in the future. Such a person is not disposed to engage in any activities with the aim of promoting a more just order. Although she may no do nothing to hinder the construction of the order, she is not disposed to activities that help to promote it, at least not because they help to promote it. Her failure is to live up to the ideal of a good citizen. It is for this that she is \textit{prima facie} blameworthy.

One obvious concern of casuistry, however, is how much work the qualifier \textit{prima facie} should be allowed to do. There may be several mitigating factors involved in attributing blameworthiness. For example, I have suggested that there might be room for reasonable disagreement about whether circumstances warrant hope insofar as such judgments are sensitive to empirical matters, the details of which may not be readily
available to all and the interpretation of which is not always obvious. Moreover, insofar as unjust systems are successful at inculcating their ideologies among the oppressed those who have suffered under past injustices might also not be hopeful because as the result of false consciousness or adaptive preferences they find it hard to endorse the values of the transition.

Political demoralization hardly seems blameworthy when it is connected to other tragic events in a person’s life. This is especially the case if the events are the result of political failures, such as the inadequate protection of security rights. The reflections of Lucy, in J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*, upon deciding to continue to live among the men who gang raped her and, in an effort to be more secure, to transfer her land to a man who is protecting one of her assailants, illustrates well demoralization of this sort.

Yes, I agree, it is humiliating. But perhaps that is a good point to start from again. Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity.  

But generally those who have previously benefited from an unjust institutional order would seem to have especially good reasons to be slow to interpret events in ways that would lead them to believe that the new order is now victimizing them since this might simply be another instance of a familiar moral weakness of believing that one deserves that to which one has become accustomed to possessing. Here I recall the words of Steve Biko, ‘[T]radition has it that whenever a group of people has tasted the lovely fruits of wealth, security and prestige it begins to find it more comfortable to believe in the obvious lie and to accept as normal that it alone is entitled to privilege.’  

So, although it is the case that reasonable people may disagree whether the institutional bases for hope are provided, and that tragic events might render hope impossible,

---

a lack of hope among those formerly unjustly privileged by an institutional order is not easily excused.

VI
This essay has in part been an effort to understand what hope is, how, to use Emily Dickenson’s words, it ‘perches in the soul.’ I have argued that hope is best understood as a compound psychological state that includes a practical aspect. This latter element is the key to distinguishing hoping from other psychological states, but also to understanding the value of hope, especially how it conduces to self-respect, and is a virtue of those who demand just institutions. I have also argued that the provision of the institutional bases of hope is virtue of political institutions, especially when they fail to provide full justice. Where this is the case, hope is virtue of good citizens. Those who fail to hope when the bases of hope have been provided have failed their fellow citizens in the effort to promote just institutions.

San Diego State University

---