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# The Value of Hope\*

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Hope obeys Aristotle's doctrine of the mean: one should neither hope too much, nor too little. But what determines what constitutes too much and what constitutes too little for a particular person at a particular time? The sceptic presents an argument to the effect that it is never rational to hope. An attempt to answer the sceptic leads us in different directions. Decision-theoretic and preference-theoretic arguments support the instrumental value of hope. An investigation into the nature of hope permits us to assess the intrinsic value of hope. However, it must be granted to the sceptic that there is a tension between hope and epistemic rationality. I conclude with some reflections about the relationship between hope and character features that are constitutive of inner strength.

‘...human kind  
Cannot bear very much reality.’  
T. S. Eliot, *Burnt Norton*, 42–43

The concept of *hope* has received little attention in the philosophical literature outside of philosophy of religion. In contrast, hope, particularly hope in a secular context, has received much attention in the arts. Moreover, the kind of attention it has received is of a distinctly philosophical nature. In artistic explorations of hope, it is common to generate a tension with respect to the *value* of hope: on the one hand, hanging on to hope in trying times may be invaluable to one's survival, while, on the other hand, giving in to hope in trying times may stand in the way of one's survival. It is a scandal that a philosophical theme that is so central to how we should live our lives, and that has received so much attention in the arts, has gone virtually unnoticed in the philosophical community itself. To remedy this, I will set out on an exploration of the nature and the value of hope starting from a particularly insightful expression of this theme, viz., Frank Darabont's film *Shawshank Redemption*, based on a short-story by Stephen King.<sup>1</sup> Similar results could

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\* I am grateful to Stephen Leeds, Iain Martel, Christopher Shields, two anonymous referees of this journal, and especially to Graham Oddie for their inspiration and/or comments.

<sup>1</sup> ‘Hope Springs Eternal—Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption.’ In: *Four Seasons*, Bergenfield, New Jersey: Viking Press, 1982.

have been reached by starting from, say, Henri Charriere's novel *Papillon*<sup>2</sup> or Eric Rohmer's film *Conte d'hiver*.

### I. Two Puzzles of Hope

Andy, a well-to-do New York banker, is wrongly convicted to life in prison for murdering his wife and her lover. In the Shawshank prison, he forms a friendship with Red who is also serving a life sentence for a murder he committed as a teenager. Andy sets up a money-laundering scheme under a false identity for a sleazy prison director. He succeeds in a spectacular escape and, at least in the film version, assumes the false identity that he has created, leaving the prison director with empty hands and the focal point of a scandal leaked to the press.

The story is told through the eyes of Red. The tension concerning the value of hope comes out most poignantly when Andy and Red discuss the value of music inside the walls of the Shawshank prison. Red gave up playing the harmonica, because 'it does not make much sense' inside the prison walls. For Andy, it is here that music 'makes the most sense,' because music represents 'something that they can't get from you, something inside that they can't touch, that is yours.' Red feigns a lack of understanding, forcing Andy to lay out his cards and to acknowledge that music is a metaphor for hope in their discussion. This is the point that Red has been waiting for to present his views on hope: 'Let me tell you something: hope is a dangerous thing, hope can drive a man insane, has got no use on the inside, better get used to that idea.' Andy gets the upper hand in their discussion by the pointed three-word rebuttal: 'Like Brookes did?' (Brookes, a fellow convict, was released on parole and hung himself being unable to get used to life outside prison.) Red, left without reply, walks out on the discussion. After his escape, Andy colors in his views on hope in a letter to Red: 'Hope is a good thing. Maybe the best of things. And hope never dies.' Red makes his point in picturesque ways at other junctions. When Andy tells him his dreams about going to Mexico, he starts dreaming along, but then catches himself and responds: 'I don't think that you ought to be doing this to yourself. It's a shitty pipe dream. Mexico is down there and I am in here.' Or, in the words that Stephen King (72) puts into Red's mouth: 'The whole idea seemed absurd, and that mental image of blue water and white beaches seemed more cruel than foolish—it dragged at my brain like a fishhook.'

The story presents us with two puzzles with respect to hope. First, there is the practical question of how much one should hope in particular circumstances. Red knew that he would be doing himself harm if he were to hope in the way that Andy did inside the walls of Shawshank. He describes how Andy could wear 'his freedom like an invisible coat,' (King, 64) but is aware that

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<sup>2</sup> Translated from the French by Patrick O'Brian. London, Hart-Davis, 1970.

he himself 'couldn't wear that invisible coat the way Andy did.' (King, 72) But also for Andy there are limits to how much hope he can support. Tommy Williams, a new inmate, provides Andy with the evidence of who killed his wife and her lover. This news releases a spurt of hope in Andy that no longer is beneficial to his survival in the Shawshank prison. Red observes that this is the one time when he knew Andy to 'lose that [inner] light': '...it was as if Tommy had produced a key which fit a cage in the back of his mind, a cage like his own cell. Only instead of holding a man, that cage held a tiger, and that tiger's name was Hope. Williams had produced the key that unlocked the cage and the tiger was out, willy-nilly, to roam his mind.' (King, 51–52) Hope seems to obey Aristotle's doctrine of the mean. To live one's life well one should not hope too much and not hope too little. But what is it that determines this mean in a particular situation and for a particular person? How can I assess how much room to allot to the tiger within, such that it will not suffocate, yet also will not raise havoc?

Second, there is a puzzle concerning the nature of inner strength and its relation to hope. Red disagrees with Andy about the place of hope inside the prison walls, but nonetheless has great respect for Andy's manner of comporting himself inside Shawshank. He knows that it is precisely this sense of hope that enables him to do so. It is hope that provides Andy with inner strength, but this inner strength is required to carry his hope in such a way that it does not drag him down. But what is the good of hope if its benefits are a prerequisite for its proper functioning? And what is the nature of this inner strength with which hope seems to be so tightly connected? Red fosters a sense of wonder and admiration for Andy's character. Andy never adopted 'a prison mentality[, h]is eyes never got that dull look[, h]e never developed...that flat-footed, hump-shouldered walk.' (King, 64) Red speculates that what Andy brought from the outside is a 'sense of his own worth, maybe, or a feeling that he would be the winner in the end...or maybe it was only a sense of freedom...a kind of inner light he carried around with him.' (King, 38) There seems to be a close connection between Andy's sense of self-worth and his hopes that soar beyond the prison walls. What is it about hope that supports this connection?

## II. Scepticism about Hope

In trying to determine under what conditions it is rational to believe, the philosopher typically gives a voice to the sceptic who argues that we are never justified in believing anything. Subsequently the philosopher constructs a theory of rational belief as a response to the sceptic. I will follow this philosophical practice to deal with the topic of hope.

The sceptic about hope could put forward the following challenge to the rationality of hoping. Suppose that I want something and that I believe that there is some chance that it will come about. Now either it does or it does

not come about. *Suppose it does not come about.* Then I would have been worse off having hoped than not having hoped, since I tend to be left with a greater sense of frustration after hoping than after not hoping. Witness expressions like ‘I do not dare to hope for...’ or ‘I should never have hoped for...’ *Suppose it does come about.* Then is there anything to be gained from having hoped for it? In hoping for something, I tend to fill in the contours in the brightest colors. Suppose that my hopes come true, but not precisely in the bright colors that I had pictured. Had I not hoped for anything, I would have been delighted. But having hoped as I have, I experience a sense of frustration rather than satisfaction. Either way, I would have been better off not having hoped for anything and so it is always irrational to hope for something. What the sceptic maintains is that Red not only has it right inside the walls of Shawshank, but that under *any* circumstances, a life in which one has no hopes is better than a life in which one does have hopes.

Towards the end of the story, Red is paroled and is having a hard time adjusting to life outside of the Shawshank prison. Encouraged by a letter from Andy, he decides to break his parole and take off to join him in Mexico. King concludes the novel with the following words in the voice of Red: ‘I hope Andy is down there. I hope I can make it across the border. I hope to see my friend and shake his hand. I hope the Pacific is as blue as it has been in my dreams. I *hope.*’ (King, 101) The moral of the story is that Red is no longer a sceptic about hope. In his new-found freedom, he has crossed over to Andy’s side and embraced the value of hoping. But what is there to be gained from renouncing scepticism about hope? Why form a mental image of the blue of the Pacific only to meet with disappointment that its hue is less intense than one had hoped for?

Just like our beliefs and desires, our hopes are seldom under our direct control. Witness expressions such as ‘I could not bring myself to hope that...’ or ‘I could not stop hoping that...’ But just as this does not stand in the way of thinking about how we should set our beliefs and desires, it should not stand in the way of thinking how we should set our hopes. Even if direct control over our hopes is limited, our inquiry is still worthwhile in that it will inform us in how far to foster and discourage hopes in our children and how to adjust our own hopes through roundabout strategies of character planning.

### III. The Instrumental Value of Hope

Hope is instrumentally valuable in that it has an enabling function, in that it counteracts risk aversion, and in that it spawns more attainable constitutive hopes. Let us take up each feature in turn.

*a. The Enabling Function of Hope.* The sceptic appeals to what is called a *dominance argument* in decision theory. I have a choice between hoping and not hoping for some projected state of the world. The state of the world may

either come about or may not come about. Whether the state of the world does or does not come about, I am always better off not having hoped for it rather than having hoped for it. Hence, by dominance, I should not hope. What the sceptic forgets is that dominance arguments only hold if there is no causal dependency between states of the world and choices.

To see this, suppose that I have a choice between asking or not asking my daughter to help me out with some task. Two states of the world may come about, viz., either she does help me out or she does not help me out. Suppose she does help me out. Then I would have been better off not asking, since unsolicited help is better than solicited help. Suppose she does not help me out. Then I would be better off not having asked, since not being turned down is better than being turned down. Hence, either way, I would be better off not having asked and so, by dominance, I should not ask her to help me out. But this argument is clearly fallacious. My asking my daughter (who is not a teenager yet!) increases the chance that she will help me out. Dominance fails since the relevant states of the world are causally dependent on my choice.

Similarly, the sceptic's argument fails if there is a causal dependency between my hoping and the occurrence of the projected state of the world. Sometimes hoping can in no way affect whether the projected state will come about or not. For instance, I may hope all I want that the temperature will not drop below freezing on my camping trip. In this case, I have no argument (yet) with the sceptic. But sometimes hoping facilitates the realization of the projected state of the world. A hopeful rather than a defeatist attitude may at least be partly responsible for bringing some task to a successful end. It arouses a certain zeal and helps me explore alternative means to realize my goals. In this case, the sceptic has it wrong. Dominance fails since the states of the world (viz., whether I will or will not bring the task to a successful end) are causally dependent on my choice (viz., whether to hope or not to hope.)

*b. Hope Counteracts Risk Aversion.* A man and a woman are out for dinner. To provide for some evening entertainment, he takes out a coin and proposes the following gamble to her. If heads comes up, then he will pay her \$200. If tails comes up, then she will pay him \$100. She thinks for a while and says that she is willing to take up the gamble, but only if she can play this game at least one hundred times. The motivation behind this response is clear. By accepting this gamble for one game, she has a fifty-fifty chance of losing money. By accepting this gamble for one hundred games, she has no more than a negligible chance of losing money by the end of the evening. Should she accept the gamble in the one-off game?

If she is acutely short of money, we can well understand why she would not want to agree to the one-off game. In this case the gamble is a less than

fair gamble. What can be won is \$200, but what can be lost is not just \$100, but, say, \$100 and the humiliation of washing dishes all night followed by a ten-mile walk home.

But if she is not acutely short of money, then the gamble is a more than fair gamble. Now, suppose the offer were to play the game one hundred times, but spread out over a longer period at reasonably short intervals. And suppose that the chance mechanism and the payoffs were to vary, but always in such a way that the chance mechanism would yield roughly a fifty-fifty chance of winning and losing and that the relative values of the payoffs would mirror roughly the relative values of \$100 and \$200. It seems to me that none of these suppositions could provide good reason to back out of the game. But the game that she is facing now is not all that different from the game that real life has to offer. In life, we are confronted with a multitude of gambles of some kind or other, some less than fair and some more than fair. To accept the game under the suppositions stipulated above is not much different than to adopt a resolution to accept any more than fair gamble on the path of life. And since the one-off game is one such a gamble, she should accept it. If she should agree to play the game one hundred times, then she should equally agree to play the one-off game, since it is just one run in the sequence of more than fair gambles that life has to offer.

The players who adopt a resolution to accept life's more than fair gambles tend to come out as winners, while the players who resist such a resolution tend to come out as losers. And yet it is easy to succumb to myopia and to resist the more than fair gambles in life, because we are too fixated on the possible losses in each single gamble. Now the value of hope is that it makes us focus on the possible gains in more than fair gambles. It helps us overcome our myopic fixation on the possible losses in more than fair gambles. The resolution of accepting more than fair gambles will tend to be a winning strategy in the game of life at large.

But then what about fear? The value of fear is that it makes us focus on the possible losses in less than fair gambles. It helps us overcome our myopic fixation on the possible gains in less than fair gambles. The resolution to decline less than fair gambles will tend to be a winning strategy in the game of life at large. While hope is an antidote to the risk aversion that keeps us from taking up more than fair gambles, fear is an antidote to the risk proneness that makes us all too eager to take up less than fair gambles. The proper balance of hope and fear is instrumental in regulating risk-taking behavior to maximize our payoffs throughout life.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Graham Oddie drew my attention to hope's corrective role for risk aversion and fear's corrective role for risk proneness.

*c. Hope Engenders New Constitutive Hopes.* The sceptic phrases his challenge in terms of hoping that some particular state of the world will come about. But what we are hoping for may have a much more complex structure. We hope that particular states of the world will come about because we take them to be constitutive of more general states of the world. For instance, I may hope that I will be awarded a particular prize because I take this to be constitutive of gaining recognition in the field and I may hope to gain recognition in the field because I take this to be constitutive of a better professional life. Now hoping can be illuminating in that it invites us to reflect and rearrange this structure. Through hoping we spend a certain amount of mental energy on the projected states of the world and we may come to realize that what we were originally hoping for is not worth hoping for after all. Our hopes are much more fluid than the sceptic envisions them to be. I may come to realize that there are other and better ways to gain recognition in the field than by winning the prize in question or that there other and better ways to improve my professional life than by gaining recognition in the field. As I come to have such insights, I will set new constitutive hopes that I am more likely to realize because they are more in line with what I truly stand for, with my skills or with the limitations of my surroundings.

#### IV. Hope and Intrinsic Value

If hope has instrumental value, then the sceptic loses ground in cases in which the realization of the projected state is dependent upon the agency of the person who is hoping. And this is true to a certain extent in *Shawshank Redemption*. But suppose that there was no escape possible for Andy. Suppose that, as with Red, his release was entirely dependent on the whims of the parole board. As for Andy's hope that he will some day be a free man again, we cannot appeal to instrumental value. Andy may hope all he wants, this will not affect his chances that he will some day be a free man again. Would scepticism about hope be vindicated, or could there still be a point to hoping under such circumstances? I will argue that there could still be a point to hoping due to its intrinsic value. But first we need to do some preliminary work and determine what it is to hope for something.

*a. The Nature of Hope.* An attitude of hoping for some state of the world is inconsistent with being confident that it will or will not come about. In other words, one cannot hope for some state of the world, unless one has a degree of credence that it will come about which ranges between some threshold value close to 0 for confidence that it will not come about and some threshold value close to 1 for confidence that it will come about.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, one

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<sup>4</sup> I resist the more inclusive requirement that one must have a degree of credence which ranges between 0 and 1, or, in other words, that one must be short of being *certain* that the state of the world either will or will not come about. As to the upper bound, it seems to

cannot hope for some state of the world, unless one has some desire that it will come about. But the conjunction of non-confident belief and desire is a necessary and not a sufficient condition for hope. There is no conceptual confusion in affirming one's desire for some state of the world and one's belief that this state may or may not come about, while denying that one is hoping that it would come about. Consider the following case. Sophie shows up late at some party and asks me very self-confidently whether I had been hoping that she would come. Now suppose that I did indeed believe that Sophie might come and that I consider her to be a welcome guest—i.e. I prefer her coming to the party to her not coming to the party. Still, it seems to me that it would be a lie to say that I had been hoping she would come, unless I had devoted at least some mental energy to the question whether she would or would not come to the party—e.g., I had been looking at my clock wondering whether Sophie would still come, I had been turning my head earlier to check whether Sophie was amongst some newly arrived guests, etc. Let us name this devotion of mental energy to what it would be like if some projected state of the world were to materialize 'mental imaging.'

There may be various reasons why I may not engage in mental imaging in the presence of the proper belief and desire, e.g., I may be preoccupied with other matters, my desire may be too weak to trigger the mental imaging or I may intentionally refrain from mental imaging to avoid future frustration. In none of these cases can I properly be said to be hoping. Mental imaging is no less a necessary condition for hoping than the proper belief and desire. Note how the metaphorical usage of 'dreaming' for hoping—e.g., in Martin Luther King's famous words 'I have a dream'—precisely capitalizes on the component of mental imaging that is present in hoping.

Is mental imaging in conjunction with the proper belief and desire a sufficient condition for hoping? I think so. It *would* be ludicrous for me to deny that I am hoping that Sophie would come to the party, while believing that she might come, desiring that she would come and not being able to keep my attention on conversations with the other guests. What else could there be to hoping that Sophie would come to the party? Hoping *is* just having the proper belief and desire in conjunction with being engaged to some degree in mental imaging.

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me that once I am confident, even if short of being certain, that some state of the world will come about, then I no longer hope for it, but rather look forward to it. The lower bound is somewhat more tenuous. Could I not hope for world peace in my life time and yet be confident that this will not come about? It is notoriously difficult to make sense of utopian hopes. Either, the projected state in utopian hopes functions as a guiding ideal. But then, what I am hoping for strictly speaking is that the world will move closer toward peace in my life time and it is not true that I am confident that *that* will not come about. Or, utopian hopes may require a divided mind. Upon reflection, I admit that the evidence warrants confidence that world peace will not come about in my life time, but a part of me resists this confidence and this is what enables me to continue to hope.

One might be tempted by the following objection. Just as there are two kinds of beliefs, viz., latent and occurrent beliefs, there are two types of hopes, viz., latent and occurrent hopes. My description is an accurate description of occurrent hopes. For latent hopes it is sufficient to have the proper beliefs and desires. Furthermore, latency is an explanation of why, just as we can be mistaken about our beliefs, we can also be mistaken about our hopes.

I grant that I can be hoping for something while it is not the case that I am engaged in mental imaging at that very moment. Thus far it is meaningful to draw a distinction between latent and occurrent hopes. But I must have at least some intermittent episodes of mental imaging before I can be said to be hoping at all. In this respect, hoping is different from believing. There is no conceptual confusion in saying that I believe some proposition but I never gave any thought to it whatsoever. There is a conceptual confusion in saying that I hope that some state of the world will come about but I never gave any thought to it whatsoever. Suppose that upon meeting Sophie last week, I had an occurrent belief that she has hazel eyes and I had an occurrent hope that she would come to the party. But since then, I did not give a moment of thought to Sophie's hazel eyes or that she might come to the party, although I still consider her to be a welcome guest. Then, assuming that my memory is not failing me, I still have a latent belief that Sophie has hazel eyes, but it would be false to say that I still have a latent hope that Sophie will come to the party.

I do not deny that we can be mistaken about our hopes. But, unlike in the case of beliefs, latency is not a sufficient explanation for being mistaken about our hopes, since even for latent hopes there must be intermittent episodes of mental imaging. We *can* be mistaken about our hopes because we do not correctly assess one or more of their constituents and hence explanations can take on various forms. Consider a scenario on which I do indeed hope that Sophie will come to the party but refuse to acknowledge my hope. This can come about because I incorrectly assess my belief that there is some chance that she might come. It may come about because I incorrectly assess my desire that she will come. Or, most comically, it may come about because I misread my mental imaging. When my friends tease me that I can hardly quit talking about the upcoming party, I point out that this is so because I am excited, say, about the band, but not because Sophie might come. Yet curiously enough, it is when Sophie bails out and not when the band bails out that I lose all interest in the upcoming party.

*b. The Pleasures of Anticipation and the Epistemic Value of Hope.* Once we agree on what it is to hope for something, two points emerge. First, hoping has intrinsic value in that mental imaging provides for the pleasures of anticipation and this can be especially important in times of hardship. The mental play that is constitutive of hoping provides a satisfaction that one cannot

attain from attending to one's actual circumstances. In times of hardship, there is welcome respite in hoping.

Second, I argued earlier that the mental play that is constitutive of hoping permits us to restructure our hopes which can be conducive to realizing our more general hopes. But restructuring our hopes does not only have instrumental value. It is also conducive to an increased self-understanding. We restructure our hopes by reflecting on what it is that we truly want and what is attainable in our lives. Returning to our example, I may start off hoping to win the prize in question in order to gain more recognition in the field, but through mental imaging I may come to realize how unattainable or how futile my pursuits really are. As I shift my hopes to more attainable and meaningful pursuits that are no less constitutive of a better professional life, I have come to learn something about myself and my place in the world.

All other things being equal, a life with hope is a better life than a life without hope due to the pleasures of anticipation and the illumination that hope provides. But the sceptic may point out that all things are not equal because a life with hope is vulnerable to frustration and the concomitant pangs of disappointment. Certainly these have a place in the equation but it is important to give them no more weight than is due. The pleasures of anticipation may outweigh the potential pangs of disappointment. Furthermore, our hopes are fluid and often do not need to be abandoned in the face of frustration. Rather they painlessly leave the stage of our mental lives as we learn and shift our hopes towards states of the world that are more attainable or that are more in line with what we truly want. The knowledge that hope affords can safeguard us from frustration and the concomitant pangs of disappointment.<sup>5</sup>

*c. Hope, Love and Self-Worth.* There is a close connection between love on the one hand and hope or fear on the other hand. Suppose that I believe some state of the world may come about that would detract from the well-being of some person and I desire that it not come about. It would be odd to say that I love the person in question yet do not spend at least some amount of mental energy contemplating the possibility that the state of the world may or may not come about. I fear for the well-being of a loved one as my mental imaging sways more towards the former, while I hope for the well-being of a loved one as my mental imagining sways more towards the latter. Hoping and fearing for the well-being of a loved one are constitutive of loving.

Robert Adams<sup>6</sup> describes a case in which a passionate art lover is unable to tear himself away from a visit to the Cathedral of Chartres and is forced to

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<sup>5</sup> The ideas in this section originated with some stimulating comments by an anonymous referee of this journal.

<sup>6</sup> 'Motive Utilitarianism.' In: J. Glover (ed.) *Utilitarianism and its Critics*. New York, Macmillan, pp. 236–49, 1990.

do many hours of night driving, has trouble finding a place to sleep, etc. It would be a better world if our art lover would be able to enjoy art to the same extent as he actually does, but see a few sculptures less and allow himself some time to make comfortable arrangements for the night. Adams' point is that such a character is not attainable. The passion of the art lover is closely connected with his imprudence. If our art lover were to become the kind of person who could tear himself away from the sculptures in order to give himself ample time to make comfortable arrangements, then he would no longer be the passionate art lover that he was before. (Adams, 239–40) Similarly, in certain cases, it might be a better world if one could love to the same extent as one actually does and not have to subject oneself to the hazards of hoping and the agonies of fearing. But such a world is simply not attainable. When hoping and fearing are considered in isolation from their connection with other character traits, it may be the case that there is little to be said for them. But their close connection with love is what vindicates attitudes of hoping and fearing.

The argument so far is limited. It vindicates hoping when it is a case of hoping for the well-being of a loved one. Can the argument be extended to hoping for one's own future well-being? If hoping and fearing for another person's well-being are constitutive of loving him or her, then hoping and fearing for one's own well-being may well be constitutive of loving one's own self. And at least on some understanding of the concepts involved, what such loving one's own self amounts to is precisely having a sense of self-worth. Hence, just as locally irrational hopes and fears for another person's well-being may be vindicated because such attitudes are constitutive of love, locally irrational hopes and fears for one's own future well-being may be vindicated because such attitudes are constitutive of a sense of self-worth.<sup>7</sup>

What is the nature of these connections? I take it that hoping and fearing for someone's well-being are contained in a cluster of features that are constitutive of loving and that hoping and fearing for one's own future well-being are contained in a cluster of features that are constitutive of having a sense of self-worth. There is a presumption that a person who loves or has a sense of self-worth satisfies the features in the respective clusters. This presumption may be violated in special cases. The love of a parent for a child may persist after the child has passed away and this love is not contingent on a belief in an after-life. A terminally-ill cancer patient may block out her hopes and fears for the future and decide to live for the moment without losing her sense of self-worth. We ask for an explanation if someone says that she loves but does not hope or fear for the loved one's well-being, or that she has a sense of self-worth but does not hope or fear for her own future well-being, but it is short

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. M. S. Quinn (1976) 'Hoping,' *Southwestern Journal of Philosophy*, 7, p. 63 for some suggestive remarks to this effect.

of being incoherent. However, it *would* be incoherent if someone were to say that she loves or has a sense of self-worth but does not have *any* of the constitutive features contained in the respective clusters.

My vindication of hope through love and a sense of self-worth rests on the assumptions that love and a sense of self-worth are attitudes that themselves have intrinsic value. I believe that these are plausible assumptions. All other things being equal, a life in which one enters into loving relationships is a better life than a life in which one does not. All other things being equal, a life in which one has a sense of self-worth is a better life than a life in which one does not. If an attitude of hoping and fearing is indeed constitutive of love and one's sense of self-worth, then hoping and fearing are valuable precisely in this constitutive role.

### V. Hope and Epistemic Rationality

To believe that some states of the world may or may not come about is to assign a subjective probability (or range of subjective probabilities) to these states of the world. The strength of our beliefs—i.e. the magnitudes of these subjective probabilities—should be determined by the available evidence. This constraint of epistemic rationality is violated in the phenomenon of wishful thinking. The wishful thinker raises the subjective probability of desirable states of the world beyond what is warranted by the available evidence and lowers the subjective probability of undesirable states of the world below what is warranted by the available evidence.

The danger of any type of mental imaging—whether in hoping or fearing—is that the invitation of wishful thinking becomes so much more difficult to resist. This is not to say that it is impossible to hope or fear, while remaining epistemically rational. But just as it is harder to exercise self-control when the peanuts are within reach, it is harder to remain epistemically rational when one hopes or fears.

But why would this be so? I can see two reasons. First, too much mental imaging may obscure the line between reality and fancy. Consider how difficult it is to determine whether our images of early childhood incidents are constructions on grounds of stories that were told to us at an older age or are memories of actual incidents. In the same way, the distinction between reality and the mental constructions we form in hoping are easily obfuscated. And in the absence of this distinction, our capacity to form beliefs on grounds of the available evidence vanishes.

Second, hoping seems to carry with it an illusion of agency. Imagine the following strange coincidence. In an unguarded moment of boredom, I catch myself gazing up at an airplane and hoping for its downing just seconds before it actually occurs. It would not be untypical that this would elicit a sense of shame and that, in working through this sense of shame, I would need to remind myself that my hoping really had nothing to do with the

tragic event. Furthermore, hoping carries with it a stronger illusion of agency than mere desiring. Consider the following cases. Suppose that my closest friend races cars and that I attend various car-racing events. Some day I come to realize that I only attend races on the more dangerous circuits, place myself at locations that provide a good view of dangerous corners, etc. It becomes clear from my behavior that deep down I have a *desire* for an accident to happen. However, I cannot be said to *hope* for an accident to happen, since I do not find myself devoting much mental energy to what it would be like if such and such accident were to occur. Contrast this with a case in which I find myself acting in precisely the same way, but in addition my mental space is filled with unbridled thoughts about what it would be like if such and such accident were to occur, the stories I would be able to tell my friends, etc. In this case, I am not just *desiring*, but I am *hoping* for an accident to happen. Now, suppose that an accident does happen in which my closest friend is killed. I think it would not be untypical for me to encounter a greater sense of shame in the case in which I was hoping than in the case in which I was just desiring for an accident to happen.<sup>8</sup> Why would this be so?

This difference in degree of shame can be fully warranted. Though I do not want to exclude the possibility of akrasia and self-deception with respect to our hopes, hoping typically involves more of a conscious endorsement of the value of the projected state of the world than mere desiring. As such it permits for more opportunities to recognize the shamefulness of our attitudes and to reform. Hence, our failure to do so weighs heavier in the case of hoping than in the case of mere desiring. But the difference in degree of shame can also have a strictly psychological explanation. In the case of hope, unlike in the case of desire, our shame tends to become tainted with a sense of ‘*if only I had not...*’ Hoping has something in common with prayer in that it builds on an illusion of causal agency. When two of our close friends are engaged in a bitter and painful relationship, we either hide or report with a slight sense of shame that, at one point, we were hoping that they would fall in love, as if we see ourselves as being responsible for bringing them together and causing their pain.

But why does hoping as opposed to desiring have this aura of agency about it? My conjecture is that we attend to a feature of hope in circum-

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<sup>8</sup> One might object that it may be more accurate to describe my hope as the conditional hope that if an accident were to happen then I would see it and that there is no reason for shame in the face of conditional hope. This *may* indeed be the case, but there are ways of telling whether my hope is merely conditional or not. Suppose that I tend to be in a remarkably better mood after car-races in which there had been an accident and I saw it than after car-races in which there had been no accident whatsoever. Or, suppose that I am offered a seat which gives me a clear view of all the curves on which an accident might occur, so that I can be confident that if there is an accident, I will see it. However, I still continue to experience hope. Under these suppositions, I can no longer exculpate myself by saying that my hopes are merely conditional.

stances in which hoping does affect our performance and does raise the probability of the occurrence of the projected state of the world and we mistakenly generalize this feature to hoping at large. What we overlook is that there are strict constraints on the domain in which hoping is instrumentally rational. Indeed, sometimes hoping makes things so—or, at least, helps make things so. It is an understandable error that this feature of hoping is then generalized to cases of hoping in which even the most fervent hopes cannot change the probability that the projected state of the world will come about in any way. Now, if hope may carry with it this illusion of causal agency, then it is understandable that hope may lead one to overestimate the subjective probability that the state of the world will come about.

## VI. Resolving the Puzzles of Hope

The sceptic has got it wrong. It is not true that it is irrational to hope under any circumstances. Hoping is instrumentally valuable in that it helps me realize the projected state of the world, it cures me of a myopic evaluation of more than fair gambles, and it aids me in adjusting my constitutive hopes. Hoping is intrinsically valuable in that it provides for the pleasures of anticipation and respite in trying times, it helps me gain self-understanding and, it is constitutive of intrinsically valuable attitudes such as loving and having a sense of self-worth. But the sceptic does have a point. Hoping increases my frustration about missed opportunities and colors the desired states of the world in such detail that it increases the likelihood of frustration. Furthermore, hoping is an open invitation for wishful thinking and can interfere with my epistemic rationality. This analysis of the pros and cons of hoping provides a complex response to our first puzzle, i.e. the practical question of how much a particular person should hope for in a particular situation. We should evaluate the good-making features and the bad-making features of hoping for the person in question and within the situation in question. For instance, a person with low frustration tolerance should be cautious about hoping in case the projected state of the world is unlikely to come about. On the other hand, there is a clear invitation to hope in a situation in which hoping can provide for the necessary zeal that will affect the likelihood that the projected state of the world will come about. The economy of hoping requires a careful balancing act between these good-making and bad-making features and how much one should hope is a function of the circumstances, the object of hope and the character of the would-be hoper.

This analysis also provides insight into our second puzzle, viz., what is the good of hoping if the inner strength that it provides is a prerequisite for its proper functioning. There is a fast response to bypass this challenge to the value of hope. Suppose someone were to question the good of foreign exchange offices, since, after all, one needs money in order to get money. Well clearly, it is sufficient to point out that one needs one kind of money in

order to get another kind of money. Similarly, the kinds of inner strength that hoping requires are different from the kinds of inner strength that it provides. What is *needed* to hope well is (i) a sense of groundedness not to fall prey to epistemic irrationality and (ii) a degree of frustration tolerance not to let failure drag one down. What hoping *affords* is (iii) welcome respite through mental imaging, (iv) an increased self-understanding and (v) a sense of self-worth.

But this response is too easy-handed. Notice that there are intricate connections between the kinds of inner strength that hoping affords and the kinds of inner strength that hoping requires.

First, epistemic rationality and the development of a sense of self-worth are connected through the concept of *self-respect*. A person cannot respect herself unless she develops a sense of self-worth. And, in wishful thinking, a person violates the norms of self-respect. To provide a theoretical account of the relation between epistemic rationality and self-respect is a difficult endeavor. I take the following Kantian line to be promising. The wishful thinker violates the teleology of epistemic agency—i.e. the gathering of knowledge. Hence, she treats her epistemic agency as a means to some further end—say, a semblance of peace of mind—rather than as an end in itself. In treating her epistemic agency as a means to some further end, she treats herself as a means to some further end and not as an end in itself.

Second, self-understanding and a sense of self-worth are closely connected to frustration tolerance. A fine-tuned self-understanding combined with a sense of self-worth provides for a backbone to deal with failure. Low frustration-tolerance is typically associated with incertitude and a lack of self-worth.

Third, the capacity to enjoy the respite from mental imaging is closely connected to the capacity not to succumb to wishful thinking. If mental imaging comes to deteriorate into wishful thinking then, in Red's words, it starts dragging at one's brain like a fishhook and it can no longer perform the function of revitalizing one's inner strength.

Considering these intricate connections, the types of inner strength that are required to hope well are tightly linked to the types of inner strength that hoping affords. And so, through hoping, inner strength can get caught in vicious and virtuous cycles. For those who do not have sufficient inner strength to hope well, hoping can jeopardize the little resources they have. For those who do have sufficient inner strength to hope well, hoping can solidify these resources. Inner strength, in its relation to hoping, is very much subject to the biblical adage: 'The man who has will be given more and the man who has not will forfeit even what he has.' (Mark, 4: 25)