

Chapter Five

Hope

In the last chapter, we explored what is involved in our having and losing a motivating interest in our own futures. I mentioned in passing that among the psychological states that connect us to our futures is hope. Hope is often thought of as an attitude that plays a particularly important role in sustaining or interest in the future. It also seems to be a distinctively future-oriented attitude. So if we want to understand the connection between our being agent-evaluators and our being future-oriented temporal beings it is worthwhile to look more closely at hope. How should we understand what hope is? How should we understand the temporality of hope by contrast to that of desire or intending to realize on end? And how, specifically, does hope motivate us toward our futures?

I. The Belief-Desire Model of Hope

The possible objects of hope are enormously varied. One may hope for what will be brought about, if at all, through one's own efforts, through luck, through God's will, through the laws of nature, or through the forces of social progress, as, for example, one hopes to earn an A, win the lottery, be graced with patience, not be struck by lightning, and that class society will come to an end. Hopes extend from the trivial (that there is pepper jelly in the refrigerator) to the most important (that perpetual peace will be

achieved). Hopes may be on behalf of oneself, inanimate objects, animals, other people, nations, all of humanity. Hope can focus on the past and present as well as the future, as for example, one hopes that deaths reported in the newspaper were painless, or that the class one's colleague is teaching this hour is going well. One may hope for what is nearly certain, as a stellar student may hope she gets another A on her exam, and for what is improbable, such as recovering from advanced stages of cancer. One may hope for outcomes that nothing turns on (that the day lilies will bloom this week) or that everything depends (that a lifetime of struggle and sacrifice will not have been for naught). Hope may be for the immediate future (that one's turn at the traffic light will be next) or for the temporally remote.

One prominent account of what hope is—that also happens to be the target of considerable philosophical criticism¹--is the belief-desire model. It does however have the merit of capturing what the huge variety of hopings have in common.² Suitably supplemented, I think the belief-desire model of hope can give us a good account of what hope is. On this account, all hopes include, first of all, a *belief that a state-of-affairs is possible but not inevitable or assured*. If the believed probability of the something's materializing is too low, say, by being a mere *logical* rather than real possibility, then one can only wish for it, not hope for it.³ If the believed probability of something's materializing is too high, then one is planning on it, not hoping for it. The conventional rules for determining when the believed probability is too low or too high for one to be able to claim to be hoping for, as opposed to wishing for or planning on, are complex. We tolerate, and indeed encourage children to actively hope for things that we would regard as mere wishful thinking in adults—for example, the hope to become an astronaut

or the president of a country. As a general rule, people can hope for things they believe are highly unlikely when having one's hopes realized depends entirely on luck or is very important; one can hope one has bought the winning lottery ticket, or that one will survive pancreatic cancer. But when realizing one's hopes depends in part on one's agency, we generally insist on greater realism: a C student who knows that getting an A, while theoretically possible, would require skills he doesn't presently possess and is unlikely to develop in time, can wish for an A, but not hope for one. The rules governing which probability assessments are compatible with wishing, hoping, and planning-on may also be culturally variable.⁴

All hopes also include a *desire*. The relevant desire is not just for something imagined to be good in some respect. We can desire future states-of-affairs because we conceive them to be good in some respect without hoping that what we desire actually materializes. There is no oddity, for example, in desiring something regarded as good in some respect—say, winning at cards—and yet not preferring all things considered that one actually win. By contrast, there *is* something odd about hoping to win at cards and preferring that someone else win. The oddity is generated by the fact that in hoping to win, the object of desire is not just one's winning but that, among the possible outcomes of playing cards, one's winning is the outcome that actually materializes.⁵ So we might say, then, that hope involves a desire that a possible state-of-affairs *actually materializes in the temporal unfolding of events*. Describing the desire this way underscores the fact that hopes involve not just any desires but desires that we prefer to have realized; and it underscores the temporality of hoping.

So the basic view (that we'll need to supplement) is this: *hoping is an emotional attitude directed toward a temporal unfolding of events that one prefers and believes possible.*⁶

We can have desires about how the temporal unfolding of events proceeds only because we assume that there is more than one way in which events could unfold—there is more than one possible future⁷—and thus there are a plurality of possible temporal sequences, some of which match our preference structure better than others.

Because hope is directed toward what might happen in the temporal unfolding of hope is not just a pro-attitude—it is a temporally oriented pro-attitude. Desires, by contrast, while they are pro-attitudes, need not be temporally oriented at all. I might desire another piece of cake—something that if it occurred at all, would occur in my future—without that desire in any way orienting me toward a future in which I get more cake. Perhaps I have vowed to cut down on sweets, so it's the future without more sweet cake that I'm oriented to. It is instead the specific content of the desire involved in hoping—for the materialization of something in the temporal unfolding of events—that gives hope (part of) its temporal orientation.

us an account of hope that makes *those* values of hope perspicuous.⁸ But there is something else that's important about hope that the belief-desire model does enable us to capture.

In hoping even for trivial things we entertain both beliefs and desires about an imagined future, and this involves relatively sophisticated cognitive capacities. First, hoping depends on the ability to imaginatively entertain a possible future and to recognize it as not the only possible future. Entertaining possible futures means both

entertaining hypotheses about *what* the options might be, as well as entertaining those options as *developing from the present*—that is, hoping requires some sense that events proceed from here (now) to there (then).

Hoping also requires the capacity to appreciate the fact that enduring objects have not only present states, but future states as well, and to have desires about what those future states will be. My hopes, for example, for myself, my pets, and this paper I am writing, are hopes for their future state. If my dogs have hopes, that's an interesting and significant fact about their psychology. They have (at least some proto-type of) the capacity to understand an object's temporal endurance, to imagine its possible future states, and to take future possibilities seriously.

Most important, for agents, who frame future-directed intentions, plans, and life projects, and for proto-agents, who have more rudimentary capacities to frame intentions for the immediate future, is the capacity to have hopes for oneself. Having hopes for oneself involves the capacity to take one's own future seriously. In having hopes for myself, the future possibilities from which I pick are desirable, or not, because of the qualities they have as *my* future state. It is some version of me, of my life, that I am picking when I hope for one future rather than another. In hoping that my shoes will last the summer, I am alive to the fact that it will be me up ahead there, later in the summer; it will be me wearing those increasingly worn shoes; and it will be me who will have to buy new ones if they don't last. By the end of the summer, what is now the future will no longer be an imaginative prospect, a mere possibility; it will be actual; and I will be the one who has to deal with it. Because hoppers are alive to the fact that whatever is in one's future will ultimately become one's present experience, one might say that hopes are

both a preference about *one's future possibilities* as well as a preference about the real present experienced by oneself—just in the future.⁹ The capacity to take seriously that it will be oneself up there in the future enjoying or suffering the consequences of one's present intending, planning, and project formation, is surely at the root of our taking an interest in the business of intending, planning, and project formation and to framing intentions, plans and projects that one won't later regret.

Hope is by no means the only emotional attitude in which we entertain and take seriously alternate temporal unfoldings of events. Hope is one of a category of emotional attitudes that might be described as *reactions to the plurality of temporal possibilities*. Regret, for example, is a reactive attitude to the plurality of possibilities in the past. In regret, one imaginatively entertains possibilities for how events might have unfolded in the past and how things would stand now had they so unfolded. Anxiety and fretfulness, like hope, are also directed at future possibilities. Not surprisingly, anxiety often alternates with hope because it involves taking seriously undesirable future possibilities. Finally, though less obviously attuned to the plurality of possibilities, remorse, guilt, and fear at least have a temporal orientation. Fearers, like hoppers, have a future-directed concern for themselves or others. And the remorseful and guilty take seriously their own pasts, and the thought, "Had I only done otherwise!"

In sum, the significance of hope is that the capacity to hope signals the presence of a being with fairly sophisticated cognitive and attitudinal capacities. They are capacities for appreciating ourselves as temporally enduring beings and for having concerns about—taking seriously—our own and others' future states. The capacities involved in hoping enable us not only to appreciate our own temporal endurance and to

experience future-oriented *self*-concern, they also enable us appreciate the temporality of others and to experience future-oriented *other*-concern. In hoping on other's behalf, we take seriously what it will be like for them, up ahead there in the future, under different temporal unfoldings of events, and we prefer one of those unfoldings to others. Such future-oriented other-concern is at the heart of both malice and benevolence. Finally, hoping also signals the presence of cognitive capacities that are closely tied to agency (and proto-agency). Framing simple intentions, complex plans, or over-arching projects for one's life depends on capacities to imagine one's future, to take seriously the fact that what one does now will bring about one's own future, and to select among possible future trajectories.

II. The Adversity Model

Even if the belief-desire model of hope has something to say about the significance of hope, one might nevertheless think that this model fails to hit the main reason why agents value their capacity to hope. The hopes that matter most to us as agents are what we might call *practical hopes*—hopes for the success of our time-extended pursuits that are aimed at realizing ends to which we attach relatively high importance.¹⁰ In such practical hopings, we actively and strategically take ourselves toward the hoped-for future rather than passively awaiting it or relying on luck. What I am calling “pursuits” always involve some use of one's agency, though just how much may vary a good deal. One may pursue wealth by buying a lottery ticket and finding out the results of the draw each week—a minimal use of agency. Or one may pursue wealth by going to school, working hard, and investing wisely. Pure reliance on luck—for

example, hoping to get rich by having an inheritance drop in one's lap—is not a pursuit.

The pursuits that involve the greatest use of our agency are significantly time-extended ones that include a series of sub-plans on whose success the overall success of the pursuit depends. Hoping for the success of one's pursuit, then, will also entail hoping for the success of a complex set of intentions and plans. Consider getting rich by going to school, working hard, and investing wisely. Each of these means involves a complex array of intentions and plans aimed at achieving subordinate ends that are instrumentally useful in promoting the achievement of the overall goal. Hoping for the success of one's pursuit will often involve “constitutive hopes” to achieve subordinate ends.¹¹ Because, such complex, time-extended plans can run aground in all sorts of ways, and because many constitutive hopes may be disappointed along the way, the kind of hope that agents need most if they are to continue pursuing their ends is hope in the face of obstacles, setbacks, or the absence of a viable plan, that is, hope in the face of the very conditions that invite despair, if not general despair, at least despair about the particular pursuit.

If there is anything that counts as a distinctively human kind of hoping, this looks like it. Models of hope for the success of one's pursuits under conditions of adversity now dominate the literature on hope.¹² Aquinas is an oft acknowledged progenitor of what I am calling the adversity model of hope. In his view hope is directed at “a future good that is arduous and difficult—but nevertheless possible—to obtain.”¹³

The adversity model assumes that the practical hopings that matter most to agents have three distinctive features. First, they are hopes for a better future and for a break with the past. In Patrick Shade's words, “[t]he ends for which we hope are never merely future *possibilities*, nor even merely *meaningful* future goods, but rather future goods

promising improvement relative to our present state” and “the goodness of hope’s ends tends to be salvific or extensional.”¹⁴ The idea here is that the objects of hope that are most significant to agents are those that improve their lives in particularly important ways.

Second, the adversity model takes the presence of obstacles, setbacks, or the absence of a viable plan that renders the success of a pursuit uncertain to be a necessary condition for practical hope. So long as our pursuits are proceeding smoothly, there is no occasion for hope. Recall, by contrast, that on the belief-desire model, *any* reason for thinking the object of hope is merely possible rather than assured, is sufficient to ground hope. On the belief-desire model one virtually always will have a reason to think the hoped-for end of our pursuits is merely possible but not assured because of the temporal remoteness of and complex activity involved in achieving one’s ends. The adversity model of hope proposes that not just any uncertainty about the future provides the logically necessary pre-requisite for hope. Only uncertainty generated by the fact that our pursuits have run up against the limits of our agency can ground a hopeful response. On the adversity model, it is precisely this fact that distinguishes hoping from planning. When there is no obstacle to the effective use of our agency in achieving our ends, good planning is what’s needed to reach our ends. When effective agency is impeded, we must rely on hope for the successful realization of our ends rather than a plan for it.

Third, practical hope arises only in contexts where despair would be a tempting response. Reaching the limits of our practical efforts invites two very different emotional reactions: despair of attaining our end, or “a commitment to the desirability and realizability” of our end in spite of present obstacles, that is, hope.¹⁵ “The truth is,”

Marcel observes, “that there can strictly speaking be no hope except when the temptation to despair exists. Hope is the act by which this temptation is actively or victoriously overcome.”¹⁶

Fourth, practical hope under conditions of adversity retains an “aura of agency”¹⁷ even when there is nothing we can at present do, or nothing we can at present imagine doing. Practical hope has this aura of agency in the complete absence of agential activity because hoppers imaginatively project a future where agential action is possible. As Victoria McGeer so nicely puts it, “we lean into the future ready to act when actions can do some good.”¹⁸ “Thus, even in cases of extreme limitation, hope is still about taking an agential interest in the world, and in the opportunities it may afford. It is about saying: though there may be nothing we can do now to bring about what we desire, our energy is still oriented toward open possibilities, our limitations notwithstanding.”¹⁹

The significance of hope, on the adversity model, lies in the power of hope to motivate and enable agency under conditions that impose severe constraints on agency. Hope motivates agents to continue developing strategies and to acquire new information and skills that would help them surmount obstacles to success. In their cross-cultural study of hope, for example, Averill and Sundararajan observed that both Koreans and Americans said that they “worked harder” and “became better organized” because of their hopes.²⁰ Because hoping supports continued efforts to bring about the future one desires, hope increases the likelihood of a successful pursuit. And *that’s* why hope matters to agents.²¹

Although this adversity model gets us closer than the belief-desire model did to explaining why hope matters to beings like us, it’s narrow focus on hope in adversity

results in its underestimating the value of hope for agents. There is no doubt that, as agents pursuing time-extended plans, we are most aware of our hopes when they are most at risk of being dashed. And there is no doubt that the instrumental value of hoping is most salient when hope buoys us against the temptation to give up in the face of persistent or enormous obstacles. But why think that we aren't also hoping when our pursuits are going along smoothly, and that hope has no instrumental value in non-adverse conditions?

The main reason, so far as I can see, for insisting that one cannot hope for ends where there aren't obstacles to achieving them, is the thought that there would then be no way of distinguishing hoping from planning. Victoria McGeer says, for example, "If our own agency were not so limited, we wouldn't hope for what we desire we would simply plan or act so as to achieve it."²² But why must planning how to achieve and acting for the purpose of achieving one's end rule out hoping to in fact achieve it? There is, of course, an important difference between *planning on* realizing one's end and *hoping to* realize one's end. To plan on realizing one's end is to take it as a more or less sure thing that one is going to do so. To hope to realize one's end is to take it that there are significant contingencies that, while not ruling out the possibility of a successful pursuit, nevertheless make success uncertain.

So planning-on and hoping-for are two different and incompatible attitudes. But it does not follow that hoping to realize one's end and having a plan *for* realizing one's end and acting on it are incompatible. Having a plan *for* realizing one's end is not at all the same thing as planning *on* realizing it (that is taking one's plan to virtually guarantee success).

Many of the ends that we hope for are the object of hope not because there is some known obstacle to achieving those ends but simply because there is *some* factor that renders achieving the end uncertain. Consider, for example, the fact that in planning our lives we often set ends that we plan to achieve and leave working out the details of the plan for later.²³ The uncertainty of achieving one's end results not from any obstacle, but simply from one's not having bothered yet to consider either the means or the compatibility of this end with other hoped for ends and thus to confirm the possibility of a workable plan. For all we know, there may not in fact be a workable plan. We simply hope there is. In addition, any time one makes a present plan for achieving some distant end, there is almost always the risk that means that are presently at our disposal will not be later. Given the temporal remoteness of the ends of, and the complex activity involved in, many practical pursuits, we will quite often have reason to think our end is merely possible but not assured. Time-extended pursuits are chancy just by being time-extended; and the longer a pursuit takes, the more opportunities for setbacks there are.

Thus practical hope does not arise, as Marcel claimed it did, only where we also have reason to despair. Even absent obstacles or setbacks, all sorts of daunting contingencies can hedge one's practical pursuits, and practical hope will be in order. Hope prevents us from dwelling on all that might go wrong, and thus hope in as yet untroubled pursuits can be just as instrumentally valuable as hope in stalled pursuits. Furthermore, by preventing us from dwelling on all the obstacles to creating a workable plan of action, hope can be just as instrumentally valuable in *originating* a plan for pursuits as in keeping us going when those plans don't work out. In short, hope is as much a useful bulwark against fretting as it is against despair.

II. The Work of Practical Hope

Practical hopes cover quite a large and varied terrain.²⁴ Hope may be for ends realizable in the immediate future via very simple plans. My cat, for example, has practical hopes as he meows for my attention and then sits in front of the closed study door each morning, waiting to see if there is still food inside in the other cat's bowl. I have simple practical hopes as I walk to the refrigerator and reach for the door, hoping I will find my much-desired pepper jelly inside. Such simple, plan-dependent hopes for the immediate future offer no real opportunity for reconsidering whether to carry through on the plan (of waiting at the door or opening the fridge) in light of how events unfold. Once I open the refrigerator door, my hopes will be disappointed or fulfilled.

Paradigm practical hopes, however, are hopes for ends realizable only in a remoter future, and only via relatively complex time-extended plans with subordinate ends that are the object of what I earlier called "constitutive hopes." In these cases, multiple opportunities may present themselves for reconsidering whether to go forward with the plan as various setbacks, obstacles, and other planning difficulties arise. What we want from a model of practical hope is some more expansive account than either the belief-desire or the adversity model provides of the way that hope functions to sustain time-extended practical pursuits. *How exactly does hope do this?*

It is tempting to think that hope does *all* the work in sustaining practical pursuits in the face of daunting uncertainties or actual obstacles: hoppers weather uncertainties and setbacks, resisting the temptation to reconsider plans; people who lose hope let uncertainties and setbacks defeat their planning. But this surely exaggerates hope's

instrumental value. Hopeless people can still act--perhaps not easily or happily—but they can persist. Moreover, whatever motivational work hope does in sustaining time-extended practical pursuits is a work that can be done by other motivations as well—for example, by fear of what giving up would mean, or by a conviction that one owes it to others not to give up.

We would do better, then, to seek out a more modest proposal for how hope sustains time-extended practical pursuits and thus a more modest account of why hope matters. Here is what I propose: The principal motivational underpinning to practical pursuits is not hope. It's *commitment* to the practical pursuit. Hope never sustains practical pursuits all by itself, but always *seconds* a prior commitment.

To see hope as always seconding a prior commitment is to give up an all too prevalent, hydraulic conception of hope. On the latter view, having hope is like having turbo-charged motivational batteries, like the batteries in the Energizer bunny, that push one along in one's pursuits through even the most defeating circumstances. What's wrong with this view is that it allows no space for hope to be intrinsically connected with one's evaluative reasoning. Hope is, after all, hope for what one prefers to have materialize in the temporal unfolding of events. Thus hope for states-of-affairs beyond one's control (nonagential hope) is intrinsically connected with one's reasoning about the comparative value of possible future states-of-affairs. Practical hope for the success of one's time-extended pursuits is intrinsically connected with one's practical reasoning about what ends are possible, worth pursuing, and worth pursuing at what costs. Because both nonagential and practical hope are tied in this way to evaluative reasoning, hope is not, as the hydraulic view might suggest, hope *no matter what*. I may hope for sunny

skies in May, but I don't hope for sunny skies no matter what—for example, not if the sun comes with 115 degree heat. I may hope to realize my end of purchasing a ticket for an early flight to Pasadena, but I don't hope for this no matter what—for example, not if it means paying double the fare or getting up at 4:00 in the morning. Hopes are conditional, and this is because they are tied to our evaluative reasoning about the relative value of possible ends and possible states-of-affairs, and the conditions under which the realization of a particular end or the occurrence of a state-of-affairs is preferable to other possibilities.

Once we see that practical hopes are tied to practical reasoning about ends, we can see that hope must play a “seconding” motivational role. The primary motives for engaging in the practical pursuit of our ends will be the reasons we had for thinking that these ends were good ones to adopt in the first place. Hope does not provide us with an entirely new source of motivation—either in the form of some hydraulic force or in the form of some entirely new and different set of reasons. Hope simply seconds our original motivating reasons. Only on such an analysis of hope's motivational role can one explain why the acquisition of new information would ever give one reason to reset one's hopes.

Hope can second commitment, because hope, like other emotional attitudes, consists in part in a distinctive pattern of salience in our perceivings, imaginings, and thinkings about. In hoping we expend “mental energy” imagining the desired future self who has realized her plans.²⁵ We attend to the desirability of the end and to evidence that points toward possible success; hope thus seconds our commitment by making salient the reasons for keeping to the commitment—both what makes it worth pursuing and what makes it possible to pursue. In addition, in hoping we refrain from

dwelling upon alternative possible trajectories in which plans fail or falter, and disattend the undesirability of a failed endeavor. We also disattend evidence that would incline us to think that we have reached the bar for what counts as too many or too large obstacles or uncertainties given the kind of commitment we've made, and instead focus our attention on ways that problems might be surmountable or off-settable. Hope thus delays reconsideration of our practical pursuits, including the question of whether the pursuit should be abandoned. Both the attitudes of despair and fretfulness, by contrast, make salient the undesirability of wasting time and resources on what may prove a fruitless pursuit, and the possibility that this is exactly what may happen in the temporal unfolding of events. Despair and fretfulness incline us to more readily conclude that the bar for what counts as "too large" or "too many" obstacles has been reached.

If hope always seconds an antecedent commitment, its motivational role will be limited by the *degree* of commitment made to a practical pursuit. In committing oneself to any practical pursuit one sets aside the option of continuously re-raising the question, "Is this end really worth the effort?" Only setbacks or uncertainties that are sufficiently large or frequent provide a reason for reevaluating one's commitment, and possibly abandoning it. Just where the bar for "sufficiently large" and "sufficiently frequent," or "too large" and "too frequent" setbacks or uncertainties is set depends on the degree of our commitment to a time-extended practical pursuit.

In committing ourselves to a practical pursuit, we may be doing three quite different sorts of things: taking a shot, endeavoring, or totaling investing ourselves.²⁶ Hope's capacity to keep us going in the face of uncertainties depends on what kind of prior commitment we have made. Are we just taking a shot at realizing, are we

endeavoring to realize, or are we totally invested in realizing a particular end?

Imagine, for example, taking up the practical pursuit of a vocation or career, say, becoming a nun or becoming a philosophy professor. It's often hard to know in advance whether one is made of the right stuff for a particular vocation or career, or whether one will find it as satisfying in fact as it seemed in prospect, or whether one will get through the various hurdles to acquiring such a vocation or career. So one may simply set out to *take a shot* at it. The commitment to actually becoming, say, a nun or philosophy professor is thus provisional. One embarks on the practical pursuit with the intent of discovering whether or not it is worth continuing. Setbacks, obstacles, feelings of disenchantment, and the like, provide *prima facie* evidence against continuing commitment to this pursuit. Hopeful shot-takers imaginatively project themselves into the future, focusing on its desirability, disattending potential difficulties with the pursuit, and taking seriously, for example, that their future self may be a nun or a philosophy professor. But because the original commitment is provisional, the hoped-for future is entertained tentatively as simply one possibility for one's life. Hope in this case seconds a relatively weak commitment. Those who are merely taking a shot at a pursuit, however hopefully, are nevertheless prepared in advance to give up hope—to stop imagining their future going this particular direction—when the evidence of likely failure or costliness of the pursuit begins coming in.

Taking a shot at differs from *endeavoring*. In endeavoring to have a particular vocation or career, one commits oneself less provisionally to the pursuit of it. Achieving one's end is entertained not just as a tentative possibility—maybe I will, maybe I won't, we'll see how things go—but as one's present plan for one's future. To endeavor is to

commit oneself to continuing down an agential path *in spite of* setbacks, obstacles, and feelings of disenchantment—though, of course, not in an unlimited way. Commitments to endeavors are simply more resistant to unfavorable evidence than commitments to taking a shot. Because the bar for what counts as too many or too great a setback is set higher than in merely taking a shot, endeavorers resist more disappointments of their constitutive hopes than shot-takers.²⁷ Hopeful endeavorers thus take more seriously than do shot-takers the idea of themselves in the future having realized the particular end. In hopefully endeavoring to succeed in a particular pursuit, the attractive imagination of who they hope to be in the course of the temporal unfolding of events and hopeful disattention to unfavorable contingencies gives hopeful endeavorers added motivation to stick out disappointments.

Endeavorers, like those who take a shot, act in light of the possibility of failure and of the possible need to reset their ends and re-envision their future. And this separates both taking a shot and endeavoring from *total investment* in realizing an end. Those who merely take a shot remain highly flexible to alternative futures. Those who endeavor, while less flexible, remain open to revising the future they imagine for themselves once too many obstacles, setbacks or daunting uncertainties in their current trajectory arise. Those who totally invest themselves in a practical pursuit imagine that there is only one possible self that they could acceptably be in the future, and thus are highly inflexible about changing courses. Someone who is totally invested in becoming, say, a nun or a professional philosopher aims at this end not just as her present plan for her future, but as *the* plan for her future. The commitment is to continuing in the practical pursuit even should the setbacks, obstacles, and disenchantments be many and great.

Hopeful total investors can imaginatively project themselves into their hoped-for future even under the worst conditions.

Okonkwo, in Chinua Achebe's classic novel *Things Fall Apart*, acts under the idea of a future self that he cannot or will not revise.²⁸ Okonkwo's life is "ruled by a great passion—to become one of the lords of the clan. That [is] his life-spring" and what he is totally invested in.²⁹ This dominant passion springs from an even deeper, and consuming, fear of being an unmanly failure like his father who was lazy, improvident, weak, a coward, unable to take care of his family, laughed at by fellow clansman, deeply and inescapably in debt to many, and in short, an unmanly failure. That fear is, ultimately, "the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father."³⁰ As a result, Okonkwo totally invests himself in becoming the best among men; and indeed, over time, in virtue of his hard work and inflexible will, he becomes a wealthy farmer, marries three wives, becomes a great and respected warrior, and earns two honorific titles.

Okonkwo's total investment in this pursuit survives even the greatest obstacles. After achieving the life he had hoped for, Okonkwo inadvertently kills a clansman's son. As punishment, he is required to live in exile for seven years where he must entirely rebuild his life, including overcoming the disappointment of his eldest son's converting to Christianity. During these seven years of exile, which he regrets as wasted among men who were not bold and warlike,³¹ Okonkwo remains hopeful, imagining a future where he not only regains his place but achieves even greater honor:

He knew that he had lost his place among the nine masked spirits who administered justice in the clan. He had lost the chance to lead his warlike clan against the new religion....He had lost the years in which he might have taken

the highest titles in the clan. But some of these losses were not irreparable. He was determined that his return should be marked by his people. He would return with a flourish, and regain the seven wasted years. ...[T]he first thing he would do would be to rebuild his compound on a more magnificent scale. He would build a bigger barn than he had had before and he would build huts for two new wives. Then he would show his wealth by initiating his sons into the *ozo* society. Only the really great men in the clan were able to do this. Okonkwo saw clearly the high esteem in which he would be held, and he saw himself taking the highest title in the land.³²

These hopes are almost immediately disappointed upon his return. During his exile, the clan itself has undergone considerable change in response to the presence of missionaries with their church, school, trading stores, and government. His clansmen pay little attention to his return; his sons must wait two years to be initiated; and the once warlike men have “become soft like women.”³³ Things go from bad to worse. Officials of the white government interrogate Okonkwo, along with other five leaders about the burning of the missionary church. The six are briefly imprisoned, humiliated, and whipped. The town meeting upon their release, which Okonkwo hopes will produce a declaration of war, is interrupted by a government messenger demanding that the meeting be ended. Still hoping to live as a manly warrior and leader, Okonkwo kills the white messenger. Only then does Okonkwo finally realize that his clansmen will not do the manly thing and go to war, that his world has changed beyond repair, and that the future self he was totally invested in becoming will not materialize in this new world. He hangs himself.

What is important to see here is that hope sustains Okonkwo as long as it does and through quite dramatic reversals of fortune only because he is already totally invested in a certain conception of who he will be in the future. His hope seconds an already deep commitment. Not to notice this is to risk inflating the instrumental value of hope.

IV. Hope Beyond Probability

Whether one hopefully takes a shot at, hopefully endeavors to succeed in, or hopefully invests oneself in a time-extended pursuit, hope involves imaginatively projecting oneself into a future that one takes seriously as one's own possible future. Hoppers *inhabit* a desired future. The hoped-for future may, of course, be one that one thinks is less likely or even quite unlikely to materialize. To hope is to nevertheless imaginatively inhabit this less likely future possibility rather than the one that one judges is likely to occur. But how are we able, in hope, to *inhabit* a future that is often not the one we *believe* is most likely? Put less metaphorically, how can the imagination of the hoped-for future play a larger functional role in one's mental economy than does one's judgment of which future is most probable? And thus how can hoppers who believe that success is uncertain, or even that the odds of success are against them, minimize the motivational effect of that belief?

Philip Pettit has suggested that the desired future comes to play a the larger functional role, because in hoping, one puts one's beliefs about the probabilities of different futures "off-line" so that they do not affect decision-making or attitude formation. In hoping, one then acts "as if the desired prospect is going to obtain or has a

good chance of obtaining.”³⁴ In doing so, one forms attitudes and performs actions of the kind that there being a good chance of the hoped-for possibility would make intelligible.³⁵ “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 a good prospect.”³⁶

The as-if structure of hoping, Pettit suggests, is analogous to the as-if structure of taking precautions. In taking precautions, we form attitudes and action plans as-if some undesired scenario were highly likely, even if our probability assessment indicates that the precautions will have been unnecessary. He argues that the as-if thinking of hope is strategically rational just as the as-if thinking of precaution is. The as-if-an-undesired-future-is-likely thinking of precaution protects us against unacceptable possibilities by motivating us to take steps in advance to ensure against that possibility. Realistic probability assessments, which might assign a very low probability to the unacceptable possibility, would not offer similar protective benefits. Thus precautionary as-if thinking is strategically rational and worth deliberately adopting. Similarly, thinking as-if-a-preferred-future-is-likely protects against the paralyzing despair that a more realistic probability assessment might occasion and motivates us to continue trying to bring about the preferred future, thus increasing the odds that we will bring it about. Realistic probability assessments, which might assign a very low probability to the preferred possibility, would not offer similar benefits. Thus hopeful as-if thinking is strategically rational and worth deliberately adopting. As Pettit says, hope is a form of “cognitive resolve”; it is “an intentionally sustained” response,³⁷ and an “assertion of will”³⁸ in adopting a “cognitive plan.”³⁹ Hope, like precaution, then, is the voluntary

adoption of what one fully understands to be a hypothetical construction of one's future.

This picture usefully fleshes out one way that, in hopefully inhabiting the future, thoughts about the hoped-for future might come to play a greater functional role in attitude formation and planning than do our probability assessments. However, I think the analogy between hope and precaution also obscures what it means to hopefully inhabit a future possibility. The stance adopted in hope toward the future is both less hypothetical and less voluntary than the stance adopted in taking precautions.

While precautionary reasoners deliberate and act on the basis of a hypothetical worse-case scenario, rational precautionary reasoners will not form emotional attitudes on that basis. Worse-case scenario planning does all the necessary interest-protecting work. One needn't be—and shouldn't be if this is really “as-if” thinking—anxious and fearful to boot. Moreover, precautionary reasoners do not inhabit a future where things have gone badly. They entertain worse-case scenarios only during, and for the purposes of, planning. Were imaginative projection of themselves into a worse-case future a persistent accompaniment to their pursuits, they would not be precautionary reasoners, but fearful and fretful ones.

Hopers, by contrast, do not treat their hopefully imagined future as merely a strategically rational hypothesis that it might periodically be useful to adopt for planning purposes. Hopers inhabit their hoped for future. Imaginative projection of themselves into the hoped for future is constitutive of the *way* they pursue their ends. Hopeful inhabitation of a future consists in part precisely in the formation of attitudes and plans that are consistent with giving credence to the possibility of a future in which one's hopes are realized. As Pettit rightly observes, hopers form an “overall outlook,” including

emotional attitudes and action plans, appropriate to their preferred future having a strong likelihood of occurrence.⁴⁰ Indeed, hope is pragmatically useful precisely because it protects us from the depression and demoralization that realistic appraisals of our future might occasion. That suggests that hopers, unlike precautionary reasoners, take probability assessments off-line in a different way. Hoppers put probability assessment *continuously* off-line, and they put their hoped-for future continuously *on-line* so that it ongoingly shapes both deliberation and feeling. How is that possible?

In order to maintain hope when the odds are against one, hopers must find ways of *resisting* making probability assessments or of *minimizing* their motivational force once made. One option, suggested by Gabriel Marcel, is simply to refuse to anticipate the undesired future one believes is most likely. To “anticipate” the future isn’t to merely imagine it. “It would be much nearer the truth to say that in anticipating I receive, I pocket in advance, I take a certain advance percentage, on a given fact which is to come, and is quite literally credited to me.”⁴¹ Where one is captive to some intolerable situation, Marcel suggests, one may still refuse with all one’s strength to anticipate what one accepts as one’s inevitable destiny.⁴² One refuses, in my terms, to *inhabit* now the future one expects.

One might willfully refuse to think about what one knows are the real odds for all the reasons Pettit suggested. If one has made the commitment to going ahead with a pursuit in full awareness of the actual odds of success, there’s little point in continuing to think on those odds and thereby court demoralization, pessimism, and lack of confidence. Better to keep one’s eye on the prize and think positive thoughts. Entertaining hopeful visions of what the future could be has the added benefit that, if the pursuit fails, one will

at least have enjoyed the pleasures of imagined success.

A second option is self-deception. Willie Loman, in *Death of a Salesman*, works hard, though with mixed success, to conceal from himself two facts that he knows to be true—that he is an unsuccessful salesman and that his son Biff will never make something of himself.⁴³ He thus continues to hope that his sales will improve and that Biff will embark on some business venture.

Finally, the more common, and more stable strategy for sustaining hope is to *replace* assessing the probability of different possible futures with constructing an account of what makes one's preferred future a possibility *worth* focusing on. That is, what typically sustains hope is a hope narrative.

Effective hope narratives can take a variety of forms. They may draw attention to the fact that the hoped-for isn't impossible or isn't improbable. Okonkwo, for example, thinks to himself, "These losses were not irreparable." Many hope narratives for improbable outcomes begin "Others have..." (won the lottery, made something of themselves after prison, survived cancer, succeeded in fights for social justice). Or hope narratives may instead emphasize one's possession of the instrumental means—the right skill, experience, education, level of determination—appropriate to bringing about the hoped-for end. Such narratives remind the hoper that, although the odds of attaining the hoped-for end may be remote, one is just the sort of person to succeed if anyone is.

To be effective in sustaining hope, a narrative doesn't necessarily have to be aimed at showing that pursuit of the hoped-for is *realistic* (or at least not *hopeless*). The emphasis of hope narratives may instead be on the *value* of what one hopes for. Okonkwo imagines vividly the magnificent compound, bigger barn, new wives, and the initiation

only a great man can give his sons. The greater the value or importance of what one hopes for, the more reason one has to continue pursuing the hoped-for end regardless of how remote the likelihood of success may be.⁴⁴

Alternatively, instead of underscoring the great importance of what one hopes for, hope narratives may instead highlight the way that certain hopes *befit* a person like oneself or are hopes one *deserves* to have realized given the kind of person one is. It befits a parent to hope that their children will have better lives than their own. Someone who has suffered for a long time deserves to hope for a better life. Okonkwo is very clearly aware of what befits him, as a great man, to hope for.

Conclusion

Hope matters, but perhaps not in quite the ways or to the extent that we might have imagined. Focusing on dramatic cases where hope sustains efforts to survive under dire conditions or to keep pursuing some admirable dream in the face of seemingly insuperable obstacles invites both overly dramatic descriptions of why hope matters and inattention to the more basic ways that even the most simple and ordinary hopes matter. I have argued that the capacity to have particular hopes matters in two fundamental ways. First, all hoping involves cognitive and imaginative capacities that are unique to higher mammals—capacities to think of objects, including oneself, as having a future, to imagine desirable and possible temporal trajectories for those enduring objects, and to take seriously that temporal trajectory. Even the simplest hopes of humans and higher mammals rely on these cognitive and imaginative capacities.

Second, in beings like us who are capable of formulating and acting on temporally extended plans, hoping secures the kinds of commitments that we make to carrying out those plans. The hopeful imagination of the desired future self who has realized her plans, keeps the desirability, and possibility, of success in mind and keeps agents from attending to, and dwelling upon, alternative possible trajectories in which plans fail and the undesirability of pursuing plans that might fail. Hopeful agents act under an idea of their future self whose realizability they take seriously.

That hope matters in these ways does not make hope an emotional “good guy”—that is, an emotional attitude that is always worth having. The *capacity* to have hope at all may be one that cognitively sophisticated beings and agents must have. But this does not mean that all hoping is a good thing. Particular hopes may be criticizable as unrealistic, unhealthy, shallow, unbecoming one’s role, an expression of some vice, or evidence of unearned privilege. Okonkwo’s hopes sustain him in his life’s projects through extraordinary adversity, and that may seem a wonderful thing. But his hopes are also tied to an unhealthily inflexible conception of himself, an excessive pride in his powers of self-control and control of others, an irrational fear of appearing unmanly, and a blindness to the costs his hopes impose on others. What we hope for, and in the face of what contingencies, says a lot about who we are and about the value of our particular hopes. For some things it is best not to hope at all, and for most things it would be best to remain open to revising one’s hopes or exchanging them for different hopes.