

Reflections on Hope

Aneta

1. Both texts emphasize that hope is a precondition of action: if we are not hopeful, we do not act on that hope. I wonder however how much 'hope' is an apt object of a particular sort of criticism. On the one hand, hope seems to be a socially scaffolded phenomenon, i.e. other people influence/determine whether I remain hopeful or not. On the other hand, it seems to me that hope is a psychological phenomenon that is not under our (immediate) control. Another example to such a phenomenon would maybe be happiness or 'effort optimism' that we talked about a few weeks ago. Those can be maybe assessed as (ir)rational or pathological/healthy, but they do not seem to be something like virtues as Kieran suggests. Virtues are directly connected to action but psychological mechanisms are farther away, and as both texts agree, hope is a precondition to action not its source. I can be criticised for hoping for x, but I cannot be told to hope for x — that seems odd. Therefore, I am not sure whether we can say that hope is a virtue. The slogan 'how to hope well' seems odd to me for the same reasons. A structurally similar question might be: can you give a guide on how to fear well?

2. I loved the relational account of hope and especially the externalist implications of it that make aptness of hope dependent on *actual* possibilities and probabilities of change. My second question concerns aptness of hope for a particular thing x. Kieran suggests that you can hope for x even if x is very unlikely, but Stockdale argues that one only hopes well if one is appropriately sensible to real world constraints and probabilities of x. I believe that the two are not incompatible and the problem is probably if we have only one of them. Having unlikely high-hopes, such as to live in a post-racial society in our lifetime, is very motivating and I don't think that it would be practically rational to give it up for or a shift to a more likely hope, such as a hope to have another black president (or similar). The latter seems to be dependent on the former. I suppose that if you only have unlikely hopes, the fact that they will probably never be satisfied discourages you from having any hopes at all, but if you only have achievable hopes, you are risking accepting the status quo. I think it is important to act on hopes that you will never see realized, if activists hadn't acted on them, we wouldn't have made the progress we have. Therefore, I think having unlikely hopes is in Stockdale's words 'hoping well'.

Sonia:

i. I found Stockdale's discussion of how oppression shapes the objects, strength, and capacity for hope very insightful. I think it is important to more narrowly define hope in order to

assess to what extent it is useful or even necessary for progress towards justice and social change. Understanding hope as a kind of ‘perceptual-like experience’ or ‘mental imaging’ of a desired outcome (fn 3 on p. 41) does not seem to me to capture the experience of hope or to do justice to its potential force. I was thinking about hope, as opposed to optimism or wishful thinking, as a practical orientation that involves both a sense of possibility and the exercise of one’s will/resolve and powers towards the realization of that possibility. For this reason, I am not sure what to make of the claim about ‘wishful hope’ (p. 39) or hope where one passively awaits the fulfillment of one’s desires – this seems like an altogether different attitude/orientation. I like the distinction Stahl draws (p. 6) between hope one has as a spectator vs. as a member of a relevant community (or, extending this beyond political hope, as an engaged participant in a practice).

ii. I find Stahl’s idea of ‘structurally ideological political hope’ very interesting. I wonder, however, to what extent the social critic/critical theorist is in the position to diagnose such forms of ideology. It seems like we can retrospectively say that a certain movement or party or coalition conceived of its political agency in an ideological way and formed its hopes for social change on that basis. But given the difficulty of creating movements and coalitions, as well as the uncertainty of different strategies for social change, it seems very difficult and potentially counterproductive to make such pronouncements.

Katie

1. I found Stockdale’s discussion of the close connection between fear and hope to be super interesting, and would like to think more about it. We tend to think of fear as a passive emotion and of hope as an active emotion. However, as Stockdale and Stahl bring out, there are ways in which hope can lock us into a kind of passivity, where we simply hope that the system will improve on its own without needing radical interaction.

I was wondering if there might be such a thing as an active fear, and how such a fear might connect to a more active kind of hope.

2. I found Stahl’s claim that a certain sort of hope might be constitutive of certain political identities very suggestive. However, I’d like to get a better sense of what exactly they have in mind. On the face of it, the two primary examples they worked with (being Black and being a woman) are not identities that require one to hope in a particular way in order to be a member of the group. Thus, it seems to me that we could imagine that all women lose faith in the idea that conforming to gender norms will protect them, without this affecting their being socially positioned as women.

Perhaps a better example for Stahl would be the identity of being a Black *American* (as opposed to just being Black.) I could imagine it being argued that to identify as a Black American (as opposed to just being Black, or just being a member of the African diaspora) is to hold onto a kind of hope that American political structures will eventually become actively anti-racist.

Julian

(i) Much of Stockdale's discussion focuses on spelling out the various ways in which oppression can be a threat to hope. For instance, she claims that "living under oppressive conditions can render it unlikely for any number of one's hopes to be realized in virtue of the unjust barriers, constraints, and threats such people face" (p. 33). And, later on, she writes: "Oppression can threaten and damage hope through either diminishing the likelihood that a person's hopes will be realized, through a loss of desire, or both" (p. 34). But, given that not all oppression is ideological (and Stockdale doesn't seem to explicitly address the threat of ideology), I wonder whether ideological oppression might affect hope in uniquely complex ways. If ideology constitutes us as the kind of social subjects we are and the kind of individuals we take ourselves to be, then to what extent does ideology shape our hopes, much like it shapes our beliefs, desires, and values? (Perhaps McGeer's account of "hoping well" can help here?)

(ii) Stockdale emphasizes a relational conception of the self. She suggests that we should understand individuals as "subjects whose identities, opportunities, and choices are all shaped by the interpersonal and public relationships in which they exist" (p. 31). These relationships "that constitute our social environments," she adds, "affect the objects, character, and strength of people's hopes" (p. 31). But, given such relational approach, I wonder whether we should think of hope as also being a more social, relational, and more importantly, collective phenomenon. Presumably, hope becomes stronger and more resilient when shared, communicated, publicly endorsed, etc.

Luca

I have some thoughts about Stockdale's notion of "fearful hope." In particular, it seems like this may trouble the very definition of hope she is relying on. Fearful hope seems rarely to depend on relying on someone outside of your capacity to save you. In fact, this seems to be the central cause for the fear. When one is scared of walking home alone, but is hopeful they can make it, it is not because they posit some other agent will save us. This hope is positing that we will be enough, and that our agency will actually make it despite our anxieties telling us otherwise. This may loop into Katie's thoughts about active fear. In these cases, the fear almost motivates us to have more belief (and need to have belief) in our own capacities to act. It may actually motivate

stronger action, and we tend to see this in situations like empowerment brought by self defense training.

I do think the relationship between hope and the actions of others is very useful in analyzing certain types of counter-revolutionary tactics. In particular, it seems like tactics focused on coopting and subduing movements tend to utilize hope in nefarious ways. For example, institutions may provide movements "major successes" in the form of symbolic concessions, like a committee to examine the target issue, with no actual material basis (we have seen this quite a bit with university encampments). These movements may see these as something to place their hope in, divulging their own agency and giving far more power to the institutions they were targeting. The "wishing hope" Stockdale describes seems to be a potent tool of powerful institutions, and movements ought to be careful in how they approach potential successes and what it may risk for their members' hope in themselves.

Daniel

I'm interested in hearing about how to understand productive versus counterproductive moments of hope in resisting structural injustice. Stockdale posits some examples in which hope is counterproductive to recognizing injustice such as post-racial America with the Obama presidency. Mcgreer's "wishing hope" that Stockdale comments on doesn't seem to be as clear cut as Mcgreer's claim that its "necessarily a kind of hoping badly" (pg. 39). It seems to be that an account of the object of hope applies to the single Black mother that Stockdale brings up; there doesn't seem to be a one-dimensional Hope that increases/decreases, but multi-variable objects of hope (maybe community or mutual aid efforts as opposed to hope in the system). Stockdale writes that "When people place their wishful hopes in individuals and institutions in positions of power and buy into the hopeful messages that powerful agents promise, doing so can reinforce power structures that maintain oppressive patterns." (pg 39). I think an account of when hope is valuable would help delineate between productive and counter-productive forms of hope.

I would like to hear more about Warren's black nihilism/afropessimism and how it applies to a politics of hope that Stahl engages in. Specifically, I wonder how Warren's reading of hope solely applies to the Political, or other realms as well. It seems like in the 2015 work, Warren's writes on the Political, but also claims "the lack of reprieve from metaphysics, the tormenting complicity in the reproduction of violence, and the lack of a coherent grammar to articulate these dilemmas" (pg 245). Where does the Political end for Warren? Warren also praises the "brave women at the D.C. Metro Station" who responds "But I am a free woman" when "people think you're crazy when you say things like this" (pg 245). What does free mean for Warren here? The discussion of hope in agency seems pertinent, but agency in what context? Political agency? This seems wrong as Warren is pessimistic about political solutions. Moral agency? This also seems wrong as Afropessimists like Wilderson have claimed "Blacks are not Human subjects, but are instead structurally inert props" (Afropessimism, pg 15). I think that for Afropessimists, hope

would not be directed at the political nor some hope about the goodness of the world, but some form of social life in political death, some form of "endurance " in the face of the "metaphysical holocaust" that Warren describes (Warren Ontological Terror, pg. 172)

Yara:

1. I quite liked Stockdale's account regarding hope as existing differently for marginalized and oppressed folk. Specifically, her response to McGreer regarding "wishful hope" where one does not "take on the full responsibilities of agency and hence to remain overreliant on external powers to realize [one's] hope" (39). She notes that for someone who is oppressed, like in the Black mother example, she has exhausted her resources and often, wishful hoping is a sort of the only thing left available when trying to conceptualize the deep injustices and harms in the world. I agree with this account because often those who are experiencing extremely difficult circumstances rely on hope as a means to cope with the world.
2. Another point I was reflecting on was that often, marginalized communities can also sometimes tend to be even *more* hopeful than those better off, which I find really interesting. From my understanding, it is a sort of hope within their own community and other community members. This can ultimately function as a way to resist their own oppression and face the structural injustices they face. Further, if communities lose hope, then they can lose sight of possibilities in resisting their own oppression and begin to conceive of a world where their own liberation is not possible. Conversely, liberation struggles often are grounded in hope, that things can and should be otherwise. This is a point against McGreer, perhaps, since I would rather see hope in any form, even if it is characterized as just leaving it up to possibilities or "wishful hope," than see a community lose it all together. To me, any hope at all is better than no hope for the oppressed, but I am curious as to what you think of this though, is this conception of wishful hope for oppressed communities harmful in any way?