The Art of Good Hope

By
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What is hope? Though variously characterized as a cognitive attitude, an emotion, a disposition, and even a process or activity, hope, more deeply, a unifying and grounding force of human agency. We cannot live a human life without hope, therefore questions about the rationality of hope are properly recast as questions about what it means to hope well. This thesis is defended and elaborated as follows. First, it is argued that hope is an essential and distinctive feature of human agency, both conceptually and developmentally. The author then explores a number of dimensions of agency that are critically implicated in the art of hoping well, drawing on several examples from George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. The article concludes with a short section that suggests how hoping well in an individual context may be extended to hope at the collective level.

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> The soul has an absolute need of something hidden and uncertain for the maintenance of that doubt and hope and effort which are the breath of its life.
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> —George Eliot, "The Lifted Veil"

Hope is a puzzling psychological phenomenon in two distinct respects. First, despite its centrality to human life, despite its constant recurrence as a theme in literature and art, despite even its importance in various classical works of philosophy and religion (Immanuel Kant, 1950, for instance, identified the question "What may I hope?" as one of the three interests

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of speculative and practical reason[1]), the topic has received surprisingly little attention from contemporary philosophers and social scientists. In the opinion of one such philosopher, this fact alone is not just puzzling, it is a positive "scandal" (Bovens 1999). Of course, this relative lack of theoretical attention may well explain the second, more substantial respect in which hope is puzzling, namely, in specifying what kind of psychological and normative phenomenon hope actually is, whether it occurs at the individual or the collective level. Amongst the relatively few theorists who discuss hope today, there is found no clear or agreed-upon use of the concept. For instance, hope is variously identified as a special kind of cognitive attitude akin to, though perhaps also partly composed of, beliefs and desires (Bovens 1999; Pettit this volume), an emotion (Drahos this volume; Elster 1989), a disposition or capacity (Gravlee 2000), a process or activity (Snyder 1995; V. Braithwaite this volume), or finally, some combination of these things (Shade 2000). This is not to say that theorists disagree completely about how to think about hope—certainly, a number of overlapping themes recur in their discussions. But that such themes require more systematic integration if we are to use the concept of hope in a theoretically unified way across (and even within) different disciplines.

In this article, I aim to do some of this work of integration. My claim will be that hope at the individual level presents itself in myriad psychological guises (attitude, emotion, activity, disposition), not just because of ordinary language looseness with the term, though undoubtedly there is much of that. Hope involves a complex dynamic of all these things because it is, more deeply, a unifying and grounding force of human agency (cf. Cartwright this volume). This view has strong implications: for instance, that hope—or hoping—is not an option for us as (cognitively competent) human beings. To be a full-blown intentional agent—to be a creature with a rich profile of intentional and emotional states and capacities—is to be an agent that hopes, to be, in the words of Thomas Aquinas, an agent that characteristically directs mental energy toward future goods that are "hard but not impossible to obtain" (Aquinas 1964, 2a2ae 17, 1; quoted in Cartwright this volume). Hence, I take consideration of one skeptical question with regard to hope, namely, whether a life without hope is always (or even sometimes) better than a life with hope, to be simply irrelevant for creatures like us (pace Bovens 1999).[2] To live a life devoid of hope is simply not to live a human life; it is not to function—or tragically, it is to cease to function—as a human being. Thus, of the dark days in a Nazi concentration camp, Elie Wiesel (1960) writes,

> The instincts of self-preservation, of self-defense, of pride, had all deserted us. In one ultimate moment of lucidity it seemed to me that we were damned souls . . . seeking oblivion—without hope of finding it. . . . Within a few seconds, we had ceased to be men. (p. 34; quoted in Gravlee 2000)

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If hope is a condition for the possibility of leading a human life, questions of the rationality of hope must be relocated. If hoping is, or can be, irrational—epistemically or practically—this cannot be a function of hoping per se, as if hoping were something one could rationally choose to forego, say, under conditions where hope is judged to be forlorn. It must rather be a function of failing to hope well. But what is meant by hoping well?

In the psychological literature on hope, it is now commonplace to note the benefits of having a hopeful attitude or disposition. As C. R. Snyder (1995) summarizes,

> The advantages of elevated hope are many. Higher as compared with lower hope people have a greater number of goals, have more difficult goals, have success at achieving their goals, perceive their goals as challenges, have greater happiness and less distress, have superior coping skills, recover better from physical injury, and report less burnout at work, to name but a few advantages. (pp. 357-58)

Without doubting these advantages, the concept of "elevated hope" must be carefully examined. On a thin, quantitative reading, there may be reason to doubt the unalloyed benefits of such a disposition. For instance, elevated hope can lead to increased vulnerability to disappointment or despair: one's goals may not be realized, or if realized, may seem shabby in comparison to what one had hopefully anticipated. Such a tendency may also slide into a proclivity for wishful thinking, compromising one's ability to think about either one's situation or one's own capacities realistically. It may thereby support practices of self- and other deception, leading one to exploit admirable traits such as trust and confidence: for instance, one may be led to promise too much, or to accept too easily the assurances of other people, by way of achieving or delivering the things for which one hopes. Elevated hope may lead to unacceptable compromises on other fronts as well: for instance, one may become so fixated on the hoped-for end that one may cease to think sensibly or morally about the means one employs to achieve it. For all these reasons, the concept of elevated or high hope must be explicitly tempered (as it is implicitly in Snyder) by the concept of hoping well. "Hope obeys Aristotle's doctrine of the mean," Bovens (1999, 667) claims, "one should neither hope too much, nor too little." The thin reading of this "economy of hope" suggests that rational hope simply involves getting the quantity of hope right relative to "the circumstances, the objects of hope and character of the would-be hoper" (p. 680). But if what I have said is right, the question of rational hope is more productively framed in terms of getting the quality of hope right—that is, given the nature of hope, given its essential role in supporting our capacities as self-directed agents, our question should be, not how much hope, but what kind of hope serves us best and what can be done to develop our skills for hoping well?

My discussion of these themes will be divided into four parts. In the first two sections, I make the argument that hope is an essential and distinctive feature of human agency, both conceptually and developmentally. In the third section, I explore a number of dimensions of agency that are critically implicated in the art of hoping well. Here, I will flesh out my discussion using a number of examples

drawn, primarily, from George Eliot's (1996) *Middlemarch*, a novel both rich in detail and realistic in its portrayal of the many facets of good and bad hope. I conclude with a short section that suggests how hoping well in an individual context may be extended to hope at the collective level.

Hope and the Limitations of Human Agency

> Fare thee well; and God have mercy upon one of our souls! He may have mercy upon mine, but my hope is better; and so look to thyself.
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> —William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*

Most writers on hope acknowledge an important—and positive—connection between hope and agency. For instance, according to hope theory as articulated by psychologists, hope is a cognitive activity that involves setting concrete goals, finding pathways to achieve those goals, and tapping one's willpower or agency to move along pathways to the specified goals (Snyder 1995, 2000; V. Braithwaite this volume). I think something is importantly right about this analysis, but I want to begin by emphasizing another, seemingly negative aspect of the connection between hope and agency, namely, the inevitable confrontation with agential limitation.

Hope arises in situations where we understand our own agency to be limited with respect to the things or conditions that we desire (Shade 2000). If our own agencies were not so limited, we would not hope for what we desire; we would simply plan or act so as to achieve it. Hope signifies our recognition that what we desire is beyond our current (or sole) capacity to bring about—and in the limiting case, it is beyond our capacity *tout court*: We hope for something that could not be in any way affected by our efforts to bring it about. For example, we hope that the weather will improve, we hope that our friend's test results will be good, we hope that no one was injured in yesterday's fire, and so on.

Because we seemingly hope in situations where our own agency is irrelevant to the occurrence of the hoped-for end, this may suggest that an analysis of hope should downplay the connection between hope and agency. What seems more relevant is simply that we have a desire combined with a certain epistemic state—specifically, our belief that the end for which we hope is still an open possibility.[3] I want to resist this deflationary move, not just because it articulates a concept of hope that is uninterestingly broad and superficial (Pettit this volume) but because it misses the background sense of agency that supports any experience of genuine hope. Hoping (as opposed to desiring or merely wishing) has "an aura of agency about it" (Bovens 1999, 679). In conditions where we believe our own agency is irrelevant to bringing about the hoped-for end, this aura of agency persists. The question is why? Bovens (1999), who makes this wise observation, goes off the rails, I think, when he explains this persistence in terms of a kind of illusion to which we fall prey: "My conjecture is that we attend to a feature of hope in circumstances 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" (pp. 679-80). Worse, because hope carries with it "an illusion of causal agency," according to Bovens, it can further compromise our epistemic rationality by leading us to "overestimate the subjective probability that the [hoped-for] state of the world will come about" (p. 680). I agree this can be a liability of hope: hoping may sometimes lead us to overestimate the likelihood of the hoped-for end. But there is no necessity in this, as a consequence either of hoping or of hoping under circumstances where we cannot affect the relevant ends. Nor is the aura of agency surrounding hope necessarily illusory, again even under circumstances where we cannot affect the relevant ends.

Hoping always has an aura of agency around it because hoping is essentially a way of positively and expansively inhabiting our agency, whether in thought or in deed.

For, no matter what the circumstance, hoping is a matter, not only of recognizing but also of actively engaging with our own current limitations in affecting the future we want to inhabit. It is, in other words, a way of actively confronting, exploring, and sometimes patiently biding our limitations as agents, rather than crumpling in the face of their reality. Thus, hope in the limit case is still about taking an agential interest in the future and in the opportunities it may afford. It is about saying the following: although there may be nothing we can do now to bring about what we desire, our energy is still oriented toward the future, limitations notwithstanding. Our interests, our concerns, our desires, our passions—all of these continue to be engaged by what can be; hence, we lean into the future ready to act when actions can do some good (e.g., see Courville and Piper this volume). In sum, hoping always has an aura of agency around it because hoping is essentially a way of positively and expansively inhabiting our agency, whether in thought or in deed.

The crucial thought contained in this last paragraph is that human agency is about imaginatively exploring our own powers, as much as it is about using them. Hence, it is about imaginatively exploring what we can and cannot do in the world. To be effective agents, we must of course learn to negotiate this world within certain constraints. But equally, it seems, we must learn to experience our own limita-

tions, not just as limitations but as something we can act constructively in the face of, often pushing beyond these limitations and so enhancing our capacities even as we act out of them. It is often remarked that those who hope well become even more determined when obstacles are put in their way: they adapt more easily to real world constraints without sacrificing their creative energy; they explore more pathways toward reaching their goals; and they often discover reserves of untapped power in the process. In explanation of this, I want to suggest that hope is the energy and direction we are able to give, not just toward making the world as we want it to be but also toward the regulation and development of our own agency. In hoping, we create a kind of imaginative scaffolding that calls for the creative exercise of our capacities and so, often, for their development. To hope well is thus to do more than focus on hoped-for ends; it is crucial to take a reflective and developmental stance toward our own capacities as agents—hence, it is to experience ourselves as agents of potential as well as agents in fact.[4]

Becoming an Agent—Learning to Hope

> If youth is the season of hope, it is often so only in the sense that our elders are hopeful about us; for no age is so apt as youth to think its emotions, partings and resolves are the last of their kind. Each crisis seems final, simply because it is new.
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> —George Eliot, *Middlemarch*

Experiencing ourselves as agents of potential is, I think, a distinctive and critical feature of human agency. Animals may experience themselves as "agents-in-fact"—at least in a functional, if not in a conceptual, sense. That is, they may experience themselves as moved by desire for this or for that and as acting to satisfy their desires, perhaps even altering their behavior in clever ways the better to achieve their goals. To be agents-in-fact—and to experience themselves as such—is just to be self-activated, moved to do something in the world, either by instinct or by occurrent desires that are generated by something immediately present to the senses. To be a human agent, by contrast, is not just to be moved by instinct or by occurrent desire. We have a capacity to disengage from, and even subvert, these immediate appetites, lifting ourselves out of the demanding present and directing our affective concern to possible future events and situations that exist only in the imagination. The question is, how does the imaginative representation of future possibilities become so gripping for us that we are sometimes able to act even against a range of current desires, beliefs, emotions, and dispositions? How is it that we are able to invest these chimeras with such powerful motivational and regulative energy—in a word, with the energy of hope (cf. McGeer and Pettit 2002; Pettit this volume)?

My speculative answer to this question derives from the special way in which human beings develop any true agential capacities at all. Paradoxically, in comparison with other creatures, we come into the world with almost no capacity to act in self-supporting, self-directed ways. Indeed, it is sometimes observed that due to

our large head size, our species has evolved a curtailed gestation period relative to other species, leading to infants that are born, in effect, nine months premature. In addition to this, natural selection has favored in our species a greater capacity for individual learning at the cost of a more prolonged period of postnatal development. Consequently, humans are comparatively helpless in their infant state and are highly dependent on others, not just for their physical survival but, even more important, for the development of the self-standing agential capacities they lack at birth (Gould 1977a; 1977b). One essential part of this developmental process concerns what Jerome Bruner calls "parental scaffolding" (Bruner 1983).

Parental scaffolding is a bootstrapping process that exploits a capacity that human infants do have at birth—an impressive talent and drive for imitating others. For instance, even within the first few days of life, neonates will attempt to simulate a range of facial expressions assumed by adults, including those expressions with which they have some difficulty, experimenting with their own faces until they succeed. Moreover, their pleasure in doing what others do is evident: when infants kinesthetically experience a correspondence between what is happening on their own faces and the facial expressions they perceive in others, their eyes brighten; when this correspondence fails—when they cannot imitate the facial gestures presented to them—they show distress (Meltzoff 1990; Meltzoff and Gopnik 1993; Meltzoff and Moore 1977, 1983, 1992). Parents and other caretakers immediately start capitalizing on this innate imitative facility, drawing infants into progressively more complicated imitation games specifically aimed at building up their agential capacities. Thus, within the first few months, infants learn to imitate their parents' more complex body movements, then at about nine months, to imitate their simple actions on objects in a shared environment, until finally, at about 18 months, infants are imitating more complex goal-directed activities as such—they read through supposed failures in adult behavior and so imitate what actions the adults intend to perform instead of those that are actually performed (Meltzoff and Moore 1995).

This impressive trajectory is fostered every step of the way by parents' scaffolding their infant's activity. Scaffolding here involves a kind of hopeful pretence. It requires parents (or other caretakers) to engage their infants in activities that, however truncated, are meaningful from an adult's point of view in so far as they are structured in terms that presume mutual purpose and understanding among all of the participants. In these activities, parents thus treat their infants as if they are playing a meaningful role—parents treat them as if they are doing things in self-directed ways despite the fact that such self-direction is clearly beyond their current capacities or understanding. Hence, to keep the activity going, parents themselves must reenact the infant's role by reading meaning and purpose into what the infant does, often repeating these interpretations back to the infant in an exaggerated fashion and inviting the infant's imitative response. For instance, in early "conversational dances," child and parent trade vocalizations, gestures, and expressions that the parent ensures are made conversationally relevant to one another, not just by adjusting their own rhythms and affective tones but also through responsive and

interpretive imitation; for example, the baby says, "Mamamama," and the mother says, "Ma-ma, did you say ma-ma? That's right—here I am, I'm ma-ma"; then the baby says, more distinctively, "Ma-ma?" and so on (Brazleton and Tronick 1980; Kaye 1982; Trevarthen 1979). In these incremental ways, children's behavioral competence within these structures, whether linguistic or nonlinguistic, gradually increases, allowing them to assume more and more responsibility for intentionally maintaining their side of the interaction, even as these interactions are modified by the parents in increasingly complex ways. At the same time, children's experience and understanding of their own agential contributions increase primarily because whatever behaviors they initiate are treated by their parents as intentional contributions to the exchange and hence taken up and elaborated by parents in appropriate meaning-enhancing ways.

What is the significance of this form of development for hope's becoming an integral part of human agency? In light of my earlier discussion of hope and the limitations of agency, the first thing to note is that early human development involves a constant confrontation with such limitations. Consequently, and perhaps not surprisingly, distress, frustration, and anger are dominant emotions throughout this period, with children melting into tears and tantrums when the actions they try to perform simply outstrip their current capacities. Under the regimen of parental scaffolding, this frustration may even be heightened since part of its point is to expand the child's understanding and so push for further development. Two mitigating factors, however, allow the developing child to continue his or her efforts in spite of these frustrations, thus paving the way for the psychological development of hope as a fundamental stabilizing and directive force in adult agency.

The first involves the regulative side of parental scaffolding. Parents are able to use their infants' imitative drive not just to challenge them cognitively but also to provide them with emotional comfort when needed. For instance, studies show that a mother may comfort a distressed child, first, by adopting in face and voice expressions that are recognizable to the child as mirroring his or her own distress and then by modulating these in a way that expresses the easing of distress. The child, carried along by his or her innate proclivities for imitation, will often follow the direction of the mother's expressive modulation, experiencing the easing of his or her own distress in consequence (Gergely 1995; Gergely and Watson 1996). In this way, parental scaffolding can play a dual role in babies' lives, allowing developing children to experience challenge in a way that is paced with emotional support and regulation so that frustration comes to be understood as something that can be held and tolerated by them, an expectable emotional pause punctuating the rhythm of ongoing effort.

The second factor that allows developing children to contain and tolerate frustration in the face of their limitations concerns the transformative consequences of parental scaffolding. Naturally, given their initial helplessness, infants must begin by experiencing their own agential capacities through the mediation of others: what they are able to do, and what meaning it has, is supported by something

beyond them, something outside of their control. Yet under appropriately generative conditions (i.e., good enough scaffolding), this dependence does not prove debilitating. On the contrary, despite the groping, vaguely focused nature of babies' efforts, these have the effect of eliciting structured responses from others that give new direction and determination to what they do. Hence, the experience of groping toward something future and indeterminate becomes, for them, affectively associated with the exhilarating effect of self-transcendence. As this association is solidified, the need to draw upon external resources for tolerating frustration and uncertainty itself decreases. Effort against limitation and in the face of uncertainty may still generate various negative emotions, but there is now an offsetting positive association with the anticipated enhancement of agential powers; hence, frustration comes to be internally regulated by children's growing confidence in their own capacity and promise. Paradoxically, then, under a good enough regimen of parental scaffolding, any initial experience of limited and dependent quasi-agency will migrate into an energizing sense of potential agency—that is, an energizing sense that one can, through effortful interaction with a suitably responsive world, enhance one's own powers to live more capably, more expansively, more richly in that world despite the many challenges it presents. Thus, from its earliest beginnings, human agency is structured in terms of future promise and infused with the energy of hope.

Before we leave this discussion of the developmental precursors of hope in human agency, one last point deserves special emphasis. According to the account I have given, hope is a deeply social phenomenon. One could not become a properly human agent, and therefore an agent who hopes, without the scaffolding of others. It is others who invest us with our sense of how we can be in the world—who literally make it possible for us to take a hopeful, constructive stance toward the future—by initially enacting our potential for us. They are the keepers of our hope until we are enabled, by their hope in us, to become agents of hope in our own right. But what does it mean to become agents of hope in our own right? From what I have said so far, it is, minimally, to internalize the idealizing work of others with respect to ourselves—to become self-scaffolders instead of always being scaffolded from the outside. But even after we have developed this capacity, there are limits to how much self-scaffolding is possible in the absence of others' continuing support. The world must be somewhat responsive to keep our capacity to hope alive, or else we plunge into despair and forgo the human quality of our existence. To become well-formed hopers—that is, agents persistently able to energize and to regulate ourselves through hope—is thus not to lose our dependency on others; it is rather to transform how this dependency works. In fact, as I will argue in the next section, the difficulties in accomplishing this transformation are various and constitute a series of challenges to hoping well. It turns out that to meet these challenges successfully and thereby foster the art of good hope, we need to become more than self-scaffolders; we need also to become the supportive scaffolders of others. Good hope, in other words, involves empowering ourselves in part through empowering others with the energy of our hope. In this way, too, hope is a deeply social phenomenon.

The Art of Good Hope

> There is no human being who having both passions and thoughts does not think in consequence of his passions—does not find images rising in his mind which soothe the passion with hope or sting it with dread. But this, which happens to us all, happens to some with a wide difference.
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> —George Eliot, *Middlemarch*

Let me review my argument thus far: Human agency as such is distinctively an agency of potential and therefore infused by the energy of hope. Hope is deeply constitutive of our way of inhabiting the world, orienting us toward a future of self-expanding possibilities despite the existence of limitations and constraints. Without it, though we might still be able to function and even to fight to survive, as animals do, in the present-tense manner of agents-in-fact, we could not lead a fully human existence. Thus, hope is not really an option for us, in the sense of something we could rationally choose to forego. But, tragically, it is something we can lose, either partially or completely. How does this happen?

As I mentioned above, maintaining hope requires a somewhat responsive world—where for most of us and in most circumstances this means a somewhat responsive social world—a world of others who, in some way or other, support our hopes. By this, I do not mean a world that satisfies our hopes, at least as initially formed: hopes for particular ends may be dashed without compromising our basic ability to live in the light of hope. Indeed, it is characteristic of those who hope well to resolutely shift their target of hope when the world proves adamantine with respect to some hoped-for end (Shade 2000; Snyder 1995). Under particularly difficult circumstances, when choices of ends are highly restricted, this may even involve shifting the focus of our hopeful energy onto the manner with which things are done. For instance, a terminally ill patient may give up on the hope of prolonging his or her life, only to invest this energy in meeting the challenge of dying well—with courage, say, and at peace. We continue to hope just in case we invest our efforts toward some state or condition that has meaning and value for us (Gravlee 2000). A responsive world is a world that in some way or another recognizes and supports the meaning and value we give to our efforts. Keeping our capacity to hope alive in the absence of such endorsement requires considerable inner strength and imagination—strength to resist the indifference or disparagements of others and imagination to understand and enliven the transformative value of what we do. How long this can last is surely dependent on a number of factors including our own characters and backgrounds, our beliefs and commitments, and the power, extent, and quality of the indifference or antagonism with which we meet. And even though history and literature redound with heroic cases of individuals' maintaining hope against all odds, it is noteworthy that in most of these stories, there is usually some mention of a responsive other to whom these individuals turn—perhaps only in imagination and at critical moments—for support and endorsement of their hopeful struggles.

Inspiring as these stories are, I want to turn now to examples from literature for a different purpose. While an unresponsive world may conspire to defeat our hopes and, worse, our capacity to hope, we too can play a role in undermining this capacity in consequence of hoping badly. So far I have argued that hoping is an essential feature of human agency. But now I want to suggest that hoping well is an art: it is an art like reasoning well, or imagining well, or caring well for self and for others; in fact, it is an art that involves all of these things and more. Hope is often derided as a "delusive mine" (Samuel Johnson, "On the Death of Dr. Robert Levet," 1783), as a "dangerous thing . . . [that] can drive a man insane," or more picturesquely, as a tiger let loose willy-nilly to roam a person's mind (King 1982, 51-52). In the excoriating words of Lord Byron, hope is "nothing but the paint on the face of Existence; the least touch of truth rubs it off, and then we see what a hollow-cheeked harlot we have got hold of" (Marchand 1973, letter to Thomas Moore, October 28, 1815). Hope wreaks its damage through rosy-hued delusion: it makes the impossible seem possible and the possible seem far more desirable than it often

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really is. As George Eliot cautions, "Signs are small measurable things, but interpretations are illimitable, and in girls of sweet, ardent nature, every sign is apt to conjure up wonder, hope, belief, vast as a sky, and coloured by a diffused thimbleful of matter in the shape of knowledge" (Eliot 1996, 23).[5] These are indeed liabilities of hope, but as I will argue, they are liabilities that can be reduced, if not completely banished, by developing the art of good hope. To develop this art, however, or at least to understand it, we need some systematic account of how we fail to hope well.

In this section, I offer the beginning of such an analysis, building on the account sketched in the last section of the developmental precursors of becoming agents who hope. My claim will be that hoping badly is, in fact, related to this developmental history insofar as we fail in some respect to transform the dependencies inherent in childhood relations with others to dependencies that are more appropriate for self-standing adults. In my analysis, I find two major failures in this regard. The first, which leads to what I call *wishful hope*, is a failure to take on the full responsibilities of agency and hence to remain overreliant on external powers to realize one's hopes. The second, which produces *willful hope*, is more complicated. It involves the recognition of one's own responsibilities as an agent to contribute to the realization of one's hopes, but it goes too far in investing one's very sense of

identity in actually achieving the hoped-for ends. So fixated does one become on them, that other people become mere instruments to achieving these ends. Further, by failing to recognize others as self-standing agents in their own right, a willful hoper undermines the supportive role one needs others to play even in maturity. My argument will be that both wishful and willful hope are highly vulnerable to collapse, leading to the real possibility of despair and, eventually, of resignation. Recovery from either of these conditions is difficult, usually depending once again on the generous scaffolding of others. But in this recognition of one's ongoing dependency on others is the possibility of discovering a new form of hope—*responsive hope*—that bears all the hallmarks of hoping well. I discuss each of these forms of hope in turn, illustrating my discussion with examples drawn from George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, a novel that could well be described as a study in the promise, defeat, and resurrection of our human capacity to hope.

Wishful hope: The hope of desire

> [Fred Vincy] had a debt on his mind, and though no such immaterial burthen could depress that buoyant-hearted young gentleman for many hours together, there were circumstances connected with this debt which made the thought of it unusually importunate. . . . The total debt was a hundred and sixty pounds. Bambridge [the lender] was in no alarm about his money, being sure that young Vincy had backers; but he had required something to show for it, and Fred had at first given a bill with his own signature. Three months later he had renewed this bill with the signature of [his friend and guarantor] Caleb Garth. On both occasions Fred had felt confident that he should meet the bill himself, having ample funds at disposal in his own hopefulness. You will hardly demand that his confidence should have a basis in external facts; such confidence, we know, is something less coarse and materialistic: it is a comfortable disposition leading us to expect that the wisdom of providence or the folly of our friends, the mysteries of luck or the still greater mystery of our high individual value in the universe, will bring about agreeable issues. . . . Fred felt sure that he should have a present from his uncle, that he should have a run of luck, that by dint of "swapping" he should gradually metamorphose a horse worth forty pounds into a horse that would fetch a hundred at any moment. . . . And in any case, even supposing negations which only a morbid distrust could imagine, Fred had always (at that time) his father's pocket as a last resource, so that his assets of hopefulness had a sort of gorgeous superfluity about them. . . . But it was in the nature of fathers, Fred knew, to bully one about expenses: there was always a little storm over his extravagance if he had to disclose a debt, and Fred disliked bad weather within doors. . . . The easier course, plainly, was to renew the bill with a friend's signature. Why not? With the superfluous securities of hope at his command, there was no reason why he should not have increased other people's liabilities to any extent, but for the fact that men whose names were good for anything were usually pessimists, indisposed to believe that the universal order of things would necessarily be agreeable to an agreeable young gentleman. (Eliot 1996, 215-16)

Fred Vincy is the very paradigm of a wishful hoper. Born into a well-to-do but imprudent manufacturing family, he is raised on a diet of indulgence and ambitious expectation—expectation that he will lead the life of a proper gentleman, either by inheriting property from a rich and temperamental uncle or, if that fails, by passing his exams and becoming a clergyman. Fred himself pins all his hopes on the inheritance since he has no taste for study and sermonizing and has every taste for gentleman farming. In keeping with this desired outcome, he gives up his studies and hangs about at home, waiting for the turn of events that will secure his future. To pass the time, he engages in all the leisurely pursuits of a young man of means, borrowing against his prospects when necessary and getting into debt. He also spends some time fitfully pursuing his long-time love, Mary Garth, herself a hard-working and perceptive young woman who, despite her real affection for Fred, will have nothing to do with him unless he foregoes illusion and begins to do something useful with his life. Instead, he asks Mary's father to guarantee a loan, and when Fred cannot repay it, the Garth family, principally Mary and her mother, are forced to give up their meager savings. When Fred visits the Garths to apologize for the debt, his happy illusion about how a good-natured universe necessarily works to his convenience suffers its first significant blow:

> Curiously, his pain in the affair beforehand had consisted almost entirely in the sense that he must seem dishonorable and sink in the opinion of the Garths: he had not occupied himself with the inconvenience and possible injury that his breach might occasion for them, for this exercise of the imagination on other people's needs is not common with hopeful young gentlemen. Indeed, most of us are brought up in the notion that the highest motive for not doing a wrong is irrespective of the beings who would suffer the wrong. But at this moment he suddenly saw himself as a pitiful rascal who was robbing two women of their savings. (Eliot 1996, 233-34)

Although Fred is somewhat sobered by this revelatory moment, he is not significantly changed by it—that is, not changed in his habits of wishful hope. He passively awaits a more obliging future in which he inherits his uncle's property and repays the Garths, only tipping into despair when the uncle finally dies and is found to have left his money and property elsewhere. Fred is eventually saved from this despair, not by his own family who are incapable of hoping well either for themselves or for others, but by the continuing good offices and good example of the hard-working Garths, as well as a beneficently self-sacrificing neighborhood vicar appropriately named Farebrother. With Fred's best interests at heart, they keep him from flagging in his program of reform as he begins to develop a capacity for genuine hard work toward a hoped-for end that is finally reasonably formulated in terms of his own agential capacities, namely, carving out a useful, self-supporting life and winning the promised love of Mary.

Fred's story ends happily enough, thanks to the wise and generous support of others who enable him to redirect his hopeful energy toward developing his own powers of agency—however, as George Eliot remarks in the closing pages of *Middlemarch*, "I cannot say that he was never again misled by his hopefulness" (p. 780). Habits of bad hope are hard to break. To see why, it is useful to understand

both the kind of incapacity involved in wishful hope and how, developmentally, such an incapacity might arise.

The most glaring defect of wishful hope can be summarized as a failure to take on the full responsibilities of agency in both formulating and working toward the realization of one's hopes. One's capacity for formulating hopes is corrupted through their becoming attached in undisciplined ways to pure desire, and one's capacity for realizing hopes is corrupted by an overreliance on external intervention to secure one's hoped-for ends. As developing capacities of good hope depends on a good enough quality of parental scaffolding, so too a failure to develop these capacities may result, as in Fred Vincy's case, from parents who indulge rather than scaffold their children—hence, who fail to challenge their children to produce those very behaviors that lead them to be self-standing agents in their own right, with powers for directing and regulating their own achievements and development (self-scaffolding). Wishful hopers' early experience of agency will thus be corrupted in two ways: first, they will experience their "powers" as limitless insofar as desire is continually met by parental indulgence; second, they will experience their "agency" as consisting merely in the expression of desire, while the work of satisfying those desires is completely externalized—a kind of abracadabra agency. Not surprisingly, then, wishful hopers will grow up with a confident sense of their own centrality in a universe that is fundamentally geared toward satisfying their desires in some way or another.

Wishful hopers thus generate hopes that are fanciful insofar as they are not grounded in any real understanding of how they will be realized; they are simply the direct output of desires and so undisciplined by knowledge of the world. Moreover, because wishful hopers have a high dependence on external powers for bringing their hopes about, this generates a kind of passivity with respect to invoking their own powers of agency for realizing their hoped-for ends: wishful hopers await their future goods; they do not constructively work toward them. Consequently, wishful hopers fail to take a regulative or developmental stance toward their own agential capacities: their own limitations are no more relevant to the prospects of their hopes than are real conditions in the world. No wonder then that wishful hopers act out of rosy-hued illusion, exposing themselves (and others) to the loss of material and psychological goods when the hoped-for ends on which they bank do not (magically) materialize. While the loss of material goods, their own or other people's, can indeed be grave, the loss of psychological goods can prove even more punishing. These may include a loss of trust, friendship, and esteem from others as well as, in wishful hopers themselves, a loss of their very sense of self when they are suddenly confronted with an alien and unyielding universe. Thus, wishful hopers are highly vulnerable to despair. Because their hopes are unrealistic, they are quite unlikely to be realized; and because in their view the realization of their hopes follows "logically and morally" from their own centrality in the universe, wishful hopers will have developed little capacity to tolerate the frustration of their hopes or, indeed, to recover from these frustrations by redirecting their hopes in terms of better, more productive ends. Such is the fate of Fred's sister Rosamund who, even more than her brother, is deeply sunk in the illusory world of wishful hope. When

her turn comes for disappointment, the consequences are dramatic: "the terrible collapse of the illusion towards which all her hope had been strained was a stroke which had too thoroughly shaken her: her little world was in ruins, and she felt herself tottering in the midst as a lonely bewildered consciousness" (Eliot 1996, 734).

Willful hope: The hope of fear

> The service . . . [Nicholas Bulstrode] could do to the cause of religion had been through life the ground he alleged to himself for his choice of action: it had been the motive which he had poured out in his prayers. Who would use money and position better than he meant to use them? Who could surpass him in self-abhorrence and exaltation of God's cause? And to Mr. Bulstrode God's cause was something distinct from his own rectitude of conduct: it enforced a discrimination of God's enemies, who were to be used merely as instruments, and whom it would be well if possible to keep out of money and consequent influence. Also, profitable investments in trades where the power of the prince of this world showed its more active devices, became sanctified by a right application of the profits in the hands of God's servant.
>
> This implicit reasoning is essentially no more peculiar to evangelical belief than the use of wide phrases for narrow motives is peculiar to Englishmen. There is no general doctrine which is not capable of eating out our morality if unchecked by the deep-seated habit of direct fellow-feeling with individual fellow-men.
>
> But a man who believes in something else than his own greed, has necessarily a conscience or standard to which he more or less adapts himself. Bulstrode's standard had been his serviceableness to God's cause: "I am sinful and nought—a vessel to be consecrated by use—but use me!"—had been the mould into which he had constrained his immense need of being something important and predominating. And now had come a moment in which that mould seemed in danger of being broken and utterly cast away. (Eliot 1996, 582)

Nicholas Bulstrode is one of the visionary characters in *Middlemarch*—a man whose overriding hope is to bask in divine glory by extirpating, or at least by hindering, the sinful and promoting causes that are favored by God. Although we are introduced to him rather late in his career, Eliot gives a fine description of his early beginnings in London as a young and promising banker's clerk, who, though orphaned and educated at a commercial charity-school, finds community in a Calvinistic dissenting church where he discovers his evangelical potential and comes to see himself as intended by God for "special instrumentality." His hopeful energy and commitment to God's work is initially directed toward becoming a missionary. However, before he can act on this intention, he is taken under the comfortable wing of the Dunkirks, a prosperous business family in the congregation: "That was the setting-in of a new current for his ambition, directing his prospects of 'instrumentality' towards the uniting of distinguished religious gifts with successful business" (Eliot 1996, 578). Bulstrode becomes increasingly involved in the family's affairs, soon discovering that the business is actually a front for fencing stolen property. Bulstrode suffers pangs of conscience for these ill-gotten gains but manages to argue and pray himself into the conviction that God has provided him with such financial opportunities precisely to further his divine mission. His ambition fuelled

by this hopeful reasoning, Bulstrode eventually takes control of the family business, courting Dunkirk's widow after Dunkirk himself dies. An older woman, she is won over by Bulstrode's piety and dependability; however, she refuses to marry him until an attempt is made to find her long-lost daughter, who had run off some years before to escape the taint of the family business but on whom the widow still wants to settle her fortune. Bulstrode orchestrates the search, and the daughter is "not found"—or so he tells his wife to be:

> It was easy for him to settle what was due from him to others by inquiring what were God's intentions with regard to himself. Could it be for God's service that this fortune should in any considerable portion go to a young woman and her husband who were given up to the lightest pursuits, and might scatter it abroad in triviality—people who seemed to lie outside the path of remarkable providences? (pp. 580-81)

Bulstrode rationalizes his deception by invoking his hope for doing God's work and buys the silence of a seedy character named Raffles, the only person besides himself who knows of the daughter's existence. The widow marries in ignorance and dies a few years later, leaving her entire fortune to Bulstrode.

By the time we meet Bulstrode again, much time has passed. Married again, he is rich and influential—a respected banker and businessman in the town of Middlemarch, although not particularly well liked. He is a public benefactor—instrumental in establishing a new hospital—yet he is viewed as mean and narrow in his business dealings, hence hypocritical in his piety, or at least ungenerous in the way he treats others who do not share his particular moral and religious outlook. Still, he pursues his goals with determination, wielding his money and influence as God's chosen servant, until this hopeful vision is suddenly shattered by the reappearance of Raffles, who torments him with the thought that his disreputable past, including the circumstances of his first marriage, will be revealed, shaming him before others and making a mockery of his special place in God's divine plan:

> Strange, piteous conflict in the soul of this unhappy man, who had longed for years to be better than he was—who had taken his selfish passions into discipline and clad them in severe robes, so that he had walked with them as a devote quire, till now that a terror had risen among them, and they could chant no longer, but threw out their common cries for safety. (Eliot 1996, 663)

Bulstrode's worst fears are soon realized. His secrets are revealed to one and all—worse, he is implicated in the death of Raffles—and he is forced to leave Middlemarch in disgrace, a broken and blighted man, with the despairing conviction that he is now singled out by God for divine retribution, "cast out from the temple as one who had brought unclean offerings" (Eliot 1996, 582).

Bulstrode is the unhappy extreme of a character disordered by willful hope. Such hope is, in some sense, an improvement over wishful hope, insofar as willful hopers take on many responsibilities of agency in both formulating and working toward the realization of their hopes. Willful hopers invest all their energy in the achievement of their ends, however, having little understanding of the self-

aggrandizing passions that often drive them to those ends. Willful hopers are therefore quite disciplined in the way they reason from means to ends, developing plans to ground and direct their activities in light of their hopes. But they are also quite unreflective and sometimes unscrupulous, about the impact on self and on others of the means they use, always justifying these in terms of the ends pursued. Moreover, they are also quite unreflective, indeed often self-deceived, about their reasons for valuing such ends.

As with wishful hopers, it is interesting to speculate on how willful hopers develop as such. In the novel, Bulstrode is an orphan, as are a few other characters who struggle with willful hope. This suggests a contributing cause of unbalanced or neglectful parental scaffolding, with rewards given for successful agential achievement, perhaps, but little or no reassurance or comfort offered when efforts fail. If so, the early experience of agency for willful hopers would be corrupted in two ways: first, they would experience the external recognition of themselves as agents to be entirely contingent on the success of their efforts in achieving whatever ends are endorsed as meaningful or worthwhile; second, receiving no external support when their efforts fail, they would form a fairly insecure sense of self, experiencing themselves as highly vulnerable to erasure when the prescribed ends are not achieved. Hence, the underlying impetus animating the agential activities of willful hopers would not be self-satisfying desire, as with wishful hopers, but rather self-protective dread or fear—fear that they will not matter or count for anything in the absence of achievement, specifically in the absence of achieving something great or noteworthy. Consequently, although willful hopers may have rather grandiose hopes or ambitions, their hopeful activities, in contrast with wishful hopers, mask a deep uncertainty about having any place at all in the universe.

The ego-anxiety of willful hope can lead, as we have seen in Bulstrode's case, to a number of epistemic and moral liabilities. First, willful hopers' fragility in their sense of self militates against a direct and realistic confrontation with their own limitations, leading to a willful overdependence on their own powers and plans for bringing about their hoped-for ends. Driven mainly by the need to prove themselves effective agents in the world, willful hopers tend toward a kind of agential solipsism. Second, although willful hopers, unlike wishful hopers, are often quite proficient in means-end reasoning, their ego-anxious solipsism makes them blind to the psychological springs of their own behavior, encouraging a tendency to rationalize that behavior to self and others. Third, because of this solipsism, willful hopers also tend to treat others as means to their all-important ends, rather than as self-standing agents in their own right. Consequently, in the practical domain, willful hopers fail to anticipate how others, with powers and projects of their own, might contribute—positively or negatively—to the realization of the hopers' ends; and in the moral domain, willful hopers show little care for the concerns of others, leading them badly astray in their interpersonal dealings and exposing them to the potential loss of friendship, trust, and esteem. As if these liabilities were not enough, willful hopers' fixation on achieving their hoped-for ends as a way of supporting their sense of self also makes them highly vulnerable to despair. When these ends are

thwarted, they have little capacity to respond flexibly and imaginatively to the world, having lost the only thing that gives their actions meaning and purpose.

Scaffolding hope

> "I have wished very much to see you for a long while, Mr. Lydgate," said Dorothea when they were seated opposite to each other; "but I put off asking you to come until Mr. Bulstrode applied to me again about the Hospital. I know that the advantage of keeping the management of it separate from that of the Infirmary depends on you, or, at least, on the good which you are encouraged to hope for from having it under your control. And I am sure you will not refuse to tell me exactly what you think."
>
> "You want to decide whether you should give a generous support to the Hospital," said Lydgate. "I cannot conscientiously advise you to do it in dependence on any activity of mine. I may be obliged to leave the town."
>
> He spoke curtly, feeling the ache of despair as to his being able to carry out any purpose that [his wife] Rosamund had set her mind against.
>
> "Not because there is no one to believe in you?" said Dorothea, pouring out her words in clearness from a full heart. "I know the unhappy mistakes about you. I knew them from the first moment to be mistakes. You have never done anything vile. You would not do anything dishonourable."
>
> It was the first assurance of belief in him that had fallen on Lydgate's ears. He drew a deep breath, and said "Thank you." He could say no more: it was something very new and strange in his life that these few words of trust from a woman should be so much to him.
>
> "I beseech you to tell me how everything was," said Dorothea, fearlessly. "I am sure that the truth would clear you."
>
> Lydgate started up from his chair and went towards the window . . .
>
> "Tell me, pray," said Dorothea, with simple earnestness; "then we can consult together. It is wicked to let people think evil of anyone falsely, when it can be hindered."
>
> Lydgate turned, remembering where he was, and saw Dorothea's face looking up at him with a sweet trustful gravity. The presence of a noble nature, generous in its wishes, ardent in its charity, changes the lights for us: we begin to see things again in their larger, quieter masses, and to believe that we too can be seen and judged in the wholeness of our character. That influence was beginning to act on Lydgate, who had for many days been seeing all life as one who is dragged and struggling amid the throng. He sat down again, and felt that he was recovering his old self in the consciousness that he was with one who believed in it. (Eliot 1996, 716-17)

In the foregoing analysis of hoping badly, we have seen that there are two extremes to be avoided: the first, wishful hope, involves an overdependence on others in supporting our hopes and a consequent underdependence on our own powers of agency; the second, willful hope, involves the reverse, an overdependence on our own powers of agency and a consequent underdependence on others. Both ways of hoping involve insensitivity to the conditions that govern our real situation in the world. Consequently, we are bound to hope badly and to act badly because of our hopes. This may involve the problematic and even immoral treatment of others. But, just as likely, it will involve problematic and even destructive consequences for oneself. As we have seen, insensitivity to real conditions in the world can engender an inability to anticipate and adjust reasonably to difficulties as they arise, as well as an inability to tolerate the frustration of hoped-for ends without crashing into the despair of a lost sense of purpose and agency. As Eliot says,

"We are on a perilous margin when we begin to look passively at our future selves, and see our own figures led with a dull consent into insipid misdoing and shabby achievement" (p. 736).

To steer clear of this perilous margin—or to draw back from it when we are teetering at its edge—requires discovering in ourselves a capacity for *responsive* hope. Most obviously, this capacity involves being responsive to real world constraints on formulating and pursuing our hopes. But being responsive in this way involves, as I will argue, being responsive to others in a way that acknowledges the importance of "peer scaffolding" in reviving and supporting our own sense of hopeful agency. Like parental scaffolding at an earlier stage of development, peer scaffolding is a particular mode of engagement in which individuals are supported in their capacity to hope, not primarily by way of material aid but rather by way of psychological aid. That is to say, individuals are reinforced in their own sense of effective agency by having their hopes recognized and respected as critical to that sense of agency. Still, the difference between parental scaffolding and peer scaffolding is profound. In parental scaffolding, children are not initially capable of formulating and pursuing hopes in their own right. Part of the parent's job, therefore, is to teach the child how to hope—specifically, how to direct their aims and activities to become a self-scaffolding agent of hope. By contrast, peer-scaffolding involves responding to agents as individuals who are already self-scaffolders—that is, as individuals who can and must take the lead in articulating hopes for their own lives and whose own powers of agency must be the powers that get them there, if any powers can. As Mary Garth says to Fred Vincy when he tries to off-load the responsibility of self-scaffolding onto her: "that is not the question—what I want you to do. You have a conscience of your own, I suppose" (Eliot 1996, 131).

Since the point of peer scaffolding is not to take over responsibility for directing other individualos' lives but rather to stimulate their confidence in their own hopes and capacity to realize those hopes, it is the kind of scaffolding that must reinforce their sense of self-directive agency if it is to do any good at all. But how is this reinforcement to occur if scaffolding involves a kind of dependence of one person on another? The answer lies in the way that this dependency is experienced under the regimen of effective peer scaffolding: not as essentially unidirectional but instead as potentially bidirectional. Specifically, scaffolded individuals must have the sense that through such scaffolding, their agency is supported by others with the kind of respect and acknowledgement that enables and encourages them to energize supporting others with their own hopeful energy in turn. Thus, in effective peer scaffolding, individuals are naturally drawn into a kind of community of mutually responsive hope in which each person's hopes become partly invested in the hopeful agency of others and vice versa. Existing within such a community may not make individuals any more likely to realize certain specific hopes, but at least, it will make them less likely to slide from disappointment into the passivity of ongoing despair.

Before analyzing this dynamic further, let me illustrate its development with a final pair of examples from *Middlemarch* involving two of the main characters, Dorothea Brooke and Tertius Lydgate. Although they traverse separate narrative

paths in the novel, he of town and she of country, they come together at critical moments to give each other a taste of responsive hope, leading to the kind of developmental breakthrough on each of their parts that precedes the explicit pursuit of practices of good hope.

Both Dorothea and Lydgate begin their *Middlemarch* lives with something of the ego-driven blindness of willful hope. Dorothea, the martyrish niece of a well-to-do landowner, yearns to dedicate her life to great and beneficent works but finds no easy outlet for her young passion until she meets and marries Edward Causabon, a man more than twice her age, who is professed to be a learned and important religious scholar embarked on a revolutionizing theological compendium, *The Key to all Mythologies*. Dorothea envisions a life of scholarly devotion to Causabon and his Great Work, thus becoming "wise and strong in his wisdom and strength" (Eliot 1996, 198). However, her hopes are dashed as she begins to realize that he is dusty, narrow-minded, and morbidly insecure; jealous of his ideas without really having any; and certainly incapable of rising above the footnote to produce anything worthwhile. Dorothea struggles with crushing disappointment but manages to replace her own ambitious hopes for her husband—and for herself—with pity based on a "waking presentiment that there might be a sad consciousness in his life which made as great a need on his side as her own" (p. 197). Fortunately, he dies rather early in their marriage, relieving her of his claustrophobic presence, and though she remains dedicated and loyal during his life, she refuses to carry on his research after his death, writing on the notebook of instructions he left for her, "I could not use it. Do you not see now that I could not submit my soul to yours, by working hopelessly at what I have no belief in?" (pp. 506-7). Turning her back on Casaubon's dead and deadening scholarly pursuits, Dorothea's hopes begin to be revived in a more genuinely responsive mode when she discovers in Lydgate an energetically hopeful soul with whom she can share the kind of interest that "has slipped away from me since I have been married" (p. 412). Encountering him as the family's attending physician, Dorothea is fired by Lydgate's enthusiasm for finding better, more scientific methods of treating the sick. When he asks her to help with funding Bulstrode's new hospital, she is only too happy to oblige: "I am glad you told me this, Mr. Lydgate. . . . I am sure I could spare two hundred a-year for a grand purpose like this. How happy you must be, to know things that you feel sure will do great good! I wish I could awake with that knowledge every morning." (p. 413). It is the beginning of her own awakening into the energizing dynamic of responsive hope: experiencing the effectiveness of her own agency in supporting the meaningful hopes of others, her hopes for doing something worthwhile are given new life and concrete direction. More and more, she comes to trust her own judgment about how to direct her hopeful energy, even as she comes to understand that her own capacities for achieving her hopes, let alone keeping them alive, are crucially dependent on others recognizing the meaning and value of her own hopes in turn.

Lydgate's trajectory of development is not unlike Dorothea's. An orphan like she, he begins his life with grand purposes driven largely by a psychology of willful hope. Inspired by an early "conviction that the medical profession as it might be

was the finest in the world; presenting the most perfect interchange between science and art; offering the most direct alliance between intellectual conquest and social good" (Eliot 1996, 136), he arrives in Middlemarch at the age of twenty-seven, "an age at which many men . . . are hopeful of achievement, resolute in avoidance, thinking that Mammon shall never put a bit in their mouths and get astride their backs" (p. 133). Educated as a physician in London, Edinburgh, and Paris, he dreams of making a ground-breaking contribution to medical knowledge by studying the "special cases" he will come across in his Middlemarch practice. He is also bent on pursuing an ambitious program of medical reform with respect both to the treatment of diseases and to professional conduct, caring little for what enemies he may make among his older and more conservative colleagues along the way. Wellborn though not terribly well-off, Lydgate lives in arrogant confidence

To care for the hopes and hopeful agency of others is thus to care about the clarity with which they pursue their own hopes while endorsing the value of their own hopeful activities as such.

that he will build a solid practice over time, eventually achieving respectability and enough financial security to support a wife and family. Until then, he has no intention of getting married. Unhappily for these hopeful plans, he meets Fred Vincy's stunningly beautiful but deeply selfish sister, Rosamund, whose only ambition is to marry someone like Lydgate, a cut above her mercantile roots. Lydgate on his side considers her to have "just the kind of intelligence one would desire in a woman—polished, refined, docile, lending itself to finish in all the delicacies of life, and enshrined in a body which expressed this with a force of demonstration that excluded the need for other evidence" (p. 153). Eventually succumbing to her charms and stratagems, as well as to his own unexamined prejudices about the way women should contribute to a life well lived, Lydgate marries her, and they set up an expensive household according to Rosamund's hopeful expectations of what marriage to Lydgate should bring: a life of ease and prestige, without care or concern for how these conditions are met. Lydgate soon discovers in Rosamund a complete lack of interest in his work and in their real financial situation. As debts mount, his various attempts to economize are thwarted by her absolute refusal to "come down" in their neighbors' eyes. Eventually, things come to a crisis.

Harried by creditors and worn down by Rosamund's persistent obstructionism, Lydgate applies to Bulstrode for a loan of a thousand pounds. Bulstrode piously refuses at first, but when Raffles shows up on his doorstep raving from alcohol poisoning, Bulstrode panics about what he might reveal about his own disreputable past. Calling on Lydgate to treat Raffles, Bulstrode offers to stand him the loan after all, hoping to secure Lydgate's sympathy by creating in him a strong sense of personal obligation. Unaware of Bulstrode's past or of his current motivations, Lydgate accepts the money with relief and delight, "thinking of his life with its good start saved from frustration, its good purposes still unbroken" (p. 664). However, it soon transpires that Bulstrode's caution is all for naught: Raffles has already revealed the story of Bulstrode's first marriage and fortune-securing deceit to a local horse dealer. And when Raffles dies unexpectedly, the gossips of Middlemarch suspect that Bulstrode has helped him to an untimely end and then bought Lydgate's silence with the thousand pound "loan." Bulstrode and Lydgate are disgraced together. Although no charges are brought, they are shunned by the townsfolk; even Lydgate's friends are loathe to broach the subject with him—all except Dorothea, who is eager to hear his clarifying explanation: "Mr. Lydgate would understand that if his friends hear a calumny about him their first wish must be to justify. What do we live for, if it is not to make life less difficult to each other? I cannot be indifferent to the troubles of a man who advised me in *my* troubles, and attended me in my illness" (p. 691). Her circle of family and friends try to discourage her from getting involved in something that may turn out to be quite unsavory. But Dorothea will have none of it:

> I should not be afraid of asking Mr. Lydgate to tell me the truth, that I might help him. Why should I be afraid? I might do as Mr. Bulstrode proposed, and take his place in providing for the hospital; and I have to consult Mr. Lydgate to know thoroughly what are the prospects of doing good by keeping up the present plans. There is the best opportunity in the world for me to ask for his confidence; and he would be able to tell me things which might make all the circumstances clear. Then we would all stand by him and bring him out of his trouble. People glorify all sorts of bravery except the bravery they might show on behalf of their nearest neighbours. (pp. 692-93)

Dorothea's bravery is the bravery of responsive hope. In standing by Lydgate—in particular, by reassuring him of her continuing investment in the hopes he has for his own life—Dorothea rescues him from despair, eliciting from him the beginnings of a hopeful response to his own situation and thereby restoring his confidence in his own powers of agency. Although done less self-consciously, Lydgate's interaction with her in her own time of trouble has a similar supportive structure when, numbed by Casaubon's painful and foreclosing egotism, she finds fewer and fewer outlets for enacting her own powers of hopeful agency. In fact, this dynamic is repeated between various characters in a number of places throughout the novel, as Eliot investigates the conditions surrounding the loss and revival of our human capacity to hope. Many of her characters begin with high hopes but with relatively little sense of how to hope well, leading to despair or resignation when their hopes

are thwarted and a corresponding loss of their own sense of agency. Recovering hope depends on discovering some new way of relating to others, specifically a way that recognizes the interdependence between self and other in generating the best conditions for keeping hope alive. Once this interdependence is recognized, the way of good hope involves actively contributing, as Dorothea does, to a dynamic of interaction in which one's own hopes become interanimated with the hopes of others, thus creating a stable and productive environment in which these can be pursued—or, of course, retargeted when specific hopes fail.

Responsive hope: The hope of care

We have now come full circle. Recall that I began this section by noting that maintaining hope for most of us requires a somewhat responsive social world—a world of at least some particular others who recognize and support the meaning and value we give to our hopeful efforts. I did not deny that there could be exemplary instances of individuals who maintain hope in the most desperate and isolated physical and psychological conditions. But I suggested that such cases would be genuinely heroic, requiring enormous amounts of personal stamina, as well as—most likely—a rare set of background beliefs that unshakably support the hoper's continuing efforts. My purpose, however, was not to inquire further into the nature of heroic hope; it was rather to examine the conditions under which a normal capacity to hope develops and even flourishes, requiring some moral strength on the hoper's part but no dramatic heroism to ensure that hope remains an active and constructive feature of an individual's psychology, underpinning his or her sense of effective agency. George Eliot brings home to us the ways in which a responsive social world is among those conditions, as we see her various characters struggle in vain to develop and maintain the capacity to hope in the face of unsupportive social circumstances: Dorothea, Lydgate, even Fred Vincy—all of them are caught within a web of expectations, norms, and relationships that thwart their efforts to fashion their hopes well or work constructively toward realizing them. Of course, in keeping with Eliot's realism, some of these circumstances they bring on themselves: Dorothea and Lydgate, primarily by picking unsuitable spouses; and Fred Vincy, by putting all his dependence on a cranky and avowedly whimsical uncle whose intentions are as fickle and as hard to forecast as the weather. Thus, even though their dominating social circumstances are against them (including, of course, circumstances of birth and upbringing), it is important to see how they contribute to making these circumstances as bad as they are in consequence of their own wishful and willful disorders of hope. Nevertheless, whatever part they play in creating a world that is unsupportive of their hopes, the ways in which that world is unsupportive are significantly determined by the actions and attitudes of others.

Hoping well therefore involves both intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions. Intrapersonally, as we have seen, it depends on avoiding the excesses of wishful and willful hope—neither depending too much on external powers for bringing

one's hopes about nor ignoring the critical role others play in supporting (or thwarting) one's hopeful efforts. Well-balanced hopers understand the need for relying on and developing their own powers of agency in formulating and pursuing their hopes, but such hopers also understand how others can significantly affect their powers, enhancing or inhibiting them depending on the quality of their various interactions. Hence, hoping well has an interpersonal dimension as well: it depends on finding—or making—a community in which individual hopers can experience the benefits of peer scaffolding.

How is such community to be achieved? Practically speaking, the most effective course may be to cultivate in oneself an interpersonal capacity for attending to the cares and concerns of others, thus seeing them as struggling hopeful agents in their own right who require support from others if their own hopeful energy is not to flag and die. By providing this scaffolding so far as possible oneself, one reinforces and supports the meaning and value they give to their own hopes, allowing them to become more energized by the world and therefore more open to seeking alternatives for directing their hopeful energy in it. This in turn increases their capacity to respond expansively to the world, in particular to those from whom they draw support. Hence, the responsive sympathetic scaffolding one gives to others invites responsive sympathetic scaffolding from them in turn, allowing their hopes to become synergistically interanimated with one's own. Hoping well thus involves cultivating a meta-disposition in which some of one's hopeful energy becomes directed toward supporting the hopeful agency of others and, hence, toward creating the kind of environment in which one's own hopeful energy is supplemented by the hopeful energy renewed in them. In this way, hoping well draws less on the egocentric preoccupations of desire and of dread and more on the alterocentric concerns of care.

Care is without doubt the paradigm social emotion, but properly understood, it is neither blind nor self-abnegating. For instance, caring for others' capacity to hope as an effective peer scaffolder does not mean simply endorsing everything they say or do. Rather, it means inviting them to articulate and pursue their hopes in a way that supports their own sense of effective agency. Sometimes, this also means challenging them to better articulate their goals or the means they pursue to achieve them. Sometimes, it means challenging the meaning and value they have invested in particular hopes. However, such challenges must take place against a backdrop that encourages their own agential initiatives since the very point of peer scaffolding is to support these initiatives as critical to their continuing sense of efficacy and purpose. To care for the hopes and hopeful agency of others is thus to care about the clarity with which they pursue their own hopes while endorsing the value of their own hopeful activities as such. To care in this way for others' capacity to hope is in effect to support their efforts to take better care of their own hopeful agency.

Now what about caring for one's own hopeful agency? Is this not also a feature of hoping with care? The answer is emphatically yes: hoping with care involves care

that is both self-directed and other-directed. More interestingly, it is self-directed because it is other-directed and vice versa. To begin with the obvious: hoping with care, as I suggested above, requires clarity—clarity about what constitutes the real limitations of self and obstacles in the world that constrain our hopeful projects, as well as clarity about the values we endorse in pushing against these limits and obstacles to reach our hoped-for ends. Although we may strive for such clarity with regard to our own hopeful projects, it is often easier to achieve for others. Thus, in caring for the clarity of others' hopes and hopeful initiatives, we engage more readily in a practice of reflection and analysis for them, which often has consequences for the way we think about ourselves. Furthermore, in engaging others in discussions about such matters, we invite their comparative reflections on our own hopes and hopeful initiatives. Thus, we eventually benefit ourselves in caring for others by engaging our combined reflective capacities.

How else can care for self and care for others begin to pull together in the economy of hope? I argued above that caring for our own capacity to hope means caring for how others respond to us. This involves not only their reflective responsiveness in helping us gain clarity with respect to our hopes; more important, it involves their emotional responsiveness in shoring up our hopeful energy in the wake of difficulties or disappointments. I also suggested that there are ways of encouraging this responsiveness in others, namely, by showing ourselves responsive to them in their own difficult times, thus shoring up their sense of effective agency and so enabling them to support the agency of others in turn. Of course, not everyone will invest in this generative dynamic of mutually responsive hope. So caring for our own capacity to hope means actively seeking out others who are capable of investing in and so building a community of good hope. Caring for our own capacity to hope in this way is not to act out of self-satisfying desire (as in the case of wishful hope) or self-protective fear (as in the case of willful hope). It is genuinely to act with care, where this involves care for the hopes and hopeful agency of others, as much as it involves care for our own hopes and hopeful agency.

In sum, the art of good hope is both caring and careful—caring in doing one's utmost to create conditions under which hope thrives, but careful in understanding what those conditions are. Hence, it is the kind of hope that invites clarity—clarity about the limitations of self and others but also clarity about how such limits can be tested and transcended under real-world constraints. Such hope does not foster rosy-hued illusion; but neither does it balk at confronting limitations and obstacles with the kind of confidence that ultimately derives from operating within a community of good hope. Building such a community must therefore be the first priority of responsive hope: for in hoping well for self and others, we as individuals stand the best chance of maintaining our sense of effective agency, thus fuelling our capacity to realize our hopes and cope with difficulties when these arise. Of course, there is no ultimate protection from the disappointment of unrealized hopes. Nevertheless, in learning to hope well in the company of responsive others, we find the next best thing, namely, our most reliable protection from despair, or at least those persisting crises of despair that are the direct result of hoping badly.

Conclusion: Some Implications for Collective Hope

In this article, I have argued that maintaining hope is an essential feature of human agency. I have also argued that questions about the rationality of hope are properly concerned with the problem of hoping well. I have called hoping well an art, meaning that it is partly a *gift*—of character, background, current physical and social circumstances, and other contingencies of nature. However, it is also partly a *skill* that we can develop over time with sufficient knowledge and experience. One factor that may contribute to developing this skill is surely a theoretical understanding of what hoping well consists in, whether this helps individuals directly by giving them some benchmarks of good and bad hope or whether it helps social support organizations in providing appropriate resources for aiding individuals in developing such capacities. In any case, the art of hoping well is of considerable intellectual interest in itself, and I hope the arguments in this article go some way toward inviting further reflection on the topic.

Perhaps, the most surprising conclusion of this article is the extent to which an individual's capacity for hoping well depends on that individual's being responsive to the hopes of others and, beyond that, participating in or even building a community of others who are likewise responsive to hopeful lives beyond their own. If this analysis is right, it shows that our success as individual hopers has an irreducibly communal dimension: we cannot hope well without taking a hopeful interest in the hopes of others and vice versa. But this still falls short of what has been termed elsewhere in this volume "collective hope" (see, e.g., V. Braithwaite; Drahos; Courville and Piper).

Collective hope refers to hope individuals hold in common with others as hope for the community of which they are a part. While it builds on individual or private hopes, shared hopes become collective when individuals see themselves as hoping and so acting in concert for ends that they communally endorse. Now, there is an interesting question of how collective hope arises and, beyond that, if hoping collectively can be done well or badly. I have not much to say on this topic here. But I note that insofar as agents develop in themselves an individual capacity for hoping well, they are committed to building the kind of community in which collective hopes would naturally arise. For in such a community, individuals are psychologically and materially involved in the hopes of one another, thus paving the way for discovering or even making hopes shared in common. Furthermore, under such conditions, the hopes so shared will naturally be subject to the kind of joint reflection on what meaning and value they have for individuals in the community, thus increasing the probability that whatever hopes continue to be shared will be robustly endorsed by members of the community. Under such conditions, it is also reasonable to expect a communally endorsed process of seeking out pathways most apt for achieving such hopes under real-world constraints and collective limitations. And, surely, any hopes thus examined and endorsed stand the best chance of actively recruiting the agency of individuals in whatever manner or measure is col-

lectively deemed appropriate for accomplishing the hoped-for ends. Moreover, should these efforts fail, there is already in place a practice of interanimating concern among the individuals involved to keep collective hope alive by reviewing and sometimes retargeting the community's hopeful efforts. In sum, though I have argued for the benefits of hoping well at an individual level, there is reason to think that such practices may also provide the best conditions for generating not just hope but practices of good hope at the collective level.

Notes

1. The other two are "What can I know?" and "What ought I to do?" (Kant 1950, A805/B833).

2. Bovens poses this skeptical challenge, not to endorse it but to explain why hoping is rational for creatures like us—that is, something we could rationally choose to do. It is rational, Bovens argues, because under favorable circumstances, hoping leads us into activities that promote the likelihood of the hoped-for outcome. Furthermore, even when hope is shorn of this instrumental value (because we are not able to affect the likelihood of the hoped-for outcome), it may still be rational to hope insofar as some "intrinsic value" lies in hoping: it yields pleasure in anticipation, it sometimes promotes a better understanding of ourselves and of the ultimate desirability of what we are hoping for, and finally, it shows that we value ourselves, insofar as it shows that we care about what happens to us. Without denying any of these advantages of hope—or hoping well (more on this below)—the claim I make is stronger: hope is undoubtedly valuable to us, but it is also essential to us if we are to lead a recognizably human life.

3. Of course, it may not be a possibility in fact. The fire occurred yesterday, and people were injured or they were not. We are able to hope that they were not, only because of our own ignorance. Once we are apprised of the facts one way or the other, the space for hope disappears, although wishes may still blossom in this epistemically unyielding terrain—for example, I may wish that the fire had never started or at least that it had not taken its terrible toll.

4. On the importance of hope for self-development, see also Gravlee's discussion of Aristotle: "[Hopefulness] underlies the deliberation and self-confidence necessary both to improve one's circumstances and to cultivate the excellences of character" (Gravlee 2000, 477).

5. All *Middlemarch* page references are to the Oxford World's Classics edition (Eliot 1996).

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