

Philosophical Explorations of Hope

Apr. 18, 25, May 2, 9

3 - 4:30 p.m.

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Course Description

- Dr. Fiala will lead participants through a critical discussion of hope. What is hope exactly? How does hope function in the lives of individuals and in political thought and action? Is hope utopian or overly optimistic? Dr. Fiala will present thinking about hope from the history of philosophy and religion. And he will share insights gleaned from a new book he is editing, "Peace and Hope in Dark Times."

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Course Plan

- April 18
 - What is hope?
- April 25
 - Hope and the meaning of life
- May 2
 - Is hope a delusion?
- May 9
 - Social justice and the work of hope

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Guiding Questions

1. What exactly is hope?
2. Is hope always good?
3. Religious vs. secular hope?
4. Meaning of life and optimism? How are these connected to hope?
5. Is hope subjective? If so, how can we judge it's validity/usefulness?
6. Is hope in our control (vs. theological grace... or psychological disposition... or social situation)?
7. Are there some things we cannot hope for (unimaginable, logical contradictions, etc.)?
8. Is hope useful/good in politics/democracy?

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Fiala, Fresno Bee, April 2, 2023

“America faces a crisis of hopelessness. The good news is hope can be developed”

<https://www.fresnobee.com/opinion/readers-opinion/article273804330.html#storylink=cpy>

- A recent report from the Centers for Disease Control indicates that 42% of high school students report persistent feelings of sadness and hopelessness. April is a month of hope. So let’s think carefully about this crisis of hopelessness.
- Hope is essential for human agency. Creative, energetic people live in a space of imagination oriented toward future goods. The philosopher Gabriel Marcel linked hope to his idea of “man, the voyager.” Life is an adventure, driven by hope. Marcel says that hope is for the soul what breathing is for the body.

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- Hope sees life from a larger perspective that extends beyond the present. Hope is supported by communities that remind us of this larger sense of self. One practical solution is to look up and look around. The cramped and narrow world of small screens and instant gratification is destructive of hope. We are part of a larger process. We can each contribute in our own way to the development of that larger story.
- It helps to know that hopefulness can be cultivated. Hopefulness is not merely an emotional state, beyond our control. Hopefulness is, rather, a virtue that controls our emotions. And we can learn to be hopeful.

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- A key part of this process is to train your “hope muscle.” A hope journal can clarify what you hope for, and what you have achieved. It also helps to see role models of hopefulness. The journey of hope starts small. But over time hope grows. The example of the mountain climber comes to mind again. It is unrealistic to hope that you can leap over Mount Everest tomorrow. But you can make smaller gains and test your bootstraps until you really learn how to fly.
- Another practical suggestion is to develop other virtues associated with hope. These virtues include courage, persistence and resourcefulness. We might also add gratitude and compassion. Hopefulness grows from tenacious and courageous activity. It also emerges from a sense of self that is enlarged by love.
- We are not born knowing how to hope. We learn to be hopeful with support and education. We can help the hopeless by reminding them that hopelessness is not a fixed anchor. We can develop hope. And we can orient ourselves toward a future that is, in part, our own creation.

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What is hope?

- Cognitive resolve (Pettit)
- Mental imaging (Bovens)
- A set of virtues: persistence, general resourcefulness, and courage (Shade)
- “The Standard Account”: Desire + Uncertainty
 - Future orientation
 - Cognitive (uncertainty), Emotional (desire), Conative (wish)
- Can we hope for things we do not desire?
- Can we hope but take no action? Or show no other virtues (courage, persistence, etc.)?
- Can we hope for thing we know are impossible? Or for things that we know will happen?
- Can we hope for things that are present? Or past?

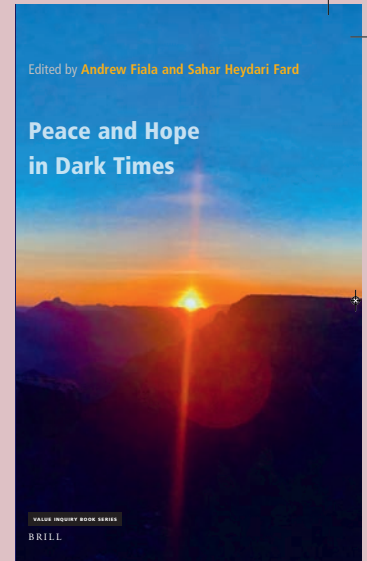
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Peace and Hope in Dark Times

Conference of Concerned Philosophers for Peace (2021)

Themes:

- Pandemic
- Economic shutdown
- Trumpism
- Climate change
- War
- etc.



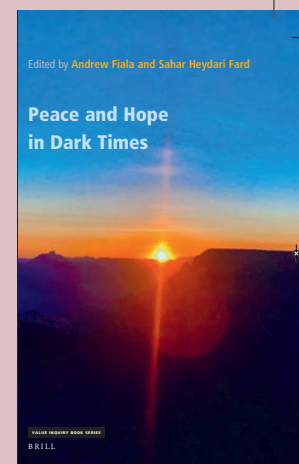
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From Peace and Hope in Dark Times

Fiala, “On Giving Birth to Hope in Darkness”

We don't merely *find* the light in the darkness. Rather, that light is *produced* by us. The light must be generated by the courageous and creative work of the human spirit. It is up to us to give birth to the light.

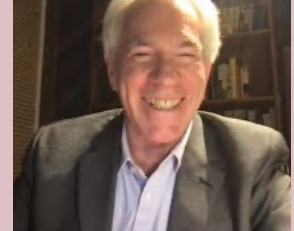
We might also say “give birth to the light you want to see.” This is the point of hope, after all: to shine a light in the darkness. The light is kindled when we speak out, take action, and begin to move in the direction we want to go. And in giving birth to light in this way, the way forward is illuminated.



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From *Peace and Hope in Dark Times* Barry Gan: Privilege, Fear, Nonviolence

- Our shelves are stocked, our stomachs full. Our homes are heated. We await vaccines that within a year may make possible a resumption of normal lives interrupted by a plague that in other times might have decimated millions more people. That we might even think to call these times “dark” smells of privilege. To call these times “dark” is a narrow view.
- However powerful the U.S. may think itself, economically or militarily, the U.S. does not feel more secure; it feels less secure. This holds whether one is a Democrat, a Republican, a Trumpist, a conservative or a socialist. The U.S. wallows in fear.



Barry Gan, Speaking
2021

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3blbFQsHYtU>

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From *Peace and Hope in Dark Times* Barry Gan: Privilege, Fear, Nonviolence

- To treat others violently, even in minor ways such as belittling another or unkindly criticizing another, builds resentment and, in the case of children, fear as well. These emotions... are reactive emotions. They are poisonous, and nonviolent practice helps drain such poisons from our lives. Nonviolence thus nourishes better relationships with others.



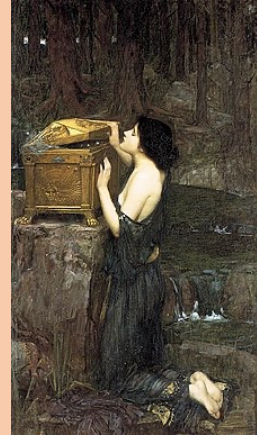
Barry Gan, Speaking
2021

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3blbFQsHYtU>

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Some historical themes

- Myth of Pandora's Jar (Hesiod)
 - Hope is female, and a curse
- Aristotle and Stoicism
 - Do not focus on hope, instead focus on courage
- Christian hope
 - heological hope vs. "passion" (emotional) hope

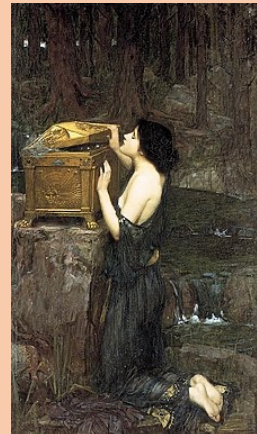


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Ambivalence of Pandora Myth

<https://plato.stanford.edu/Archives/win2022/entries/hope/>

- An ambivalent evaluation of hope is also reflected in Hesiod's version of the tale of Pandora. When all the evils had escaped from Pandora's jar, famously, only hope remained. This seems to suggest that hope can also sustain human agency in the face of widespread evil. It must be noted, however, that there are many competing interpretations of why hope remained in the jar. Was it to keep hope available for humans or, rather, to keep hope from humankind? Is hope consequently to be regarded as good... or as evil?



14

Zeus Creates Pandora, the woman Hesiod, *Works and Days*

- So said the father of men and gods, and laughed aloud. And he bade famous Hephaestus make haste and mix earth with water and to put in it the voice and strength of human kind, and fashion a sweet, lovely maiden-shape... And he charged Hermes the guide to put in her a shameless mind and a deceitful nature.
- Also the Guide contrived within her lies and crafty words and a deceitful nature at the will of loud thundering Zeus, and the Herald of the gods put speech in her. And he called this woman Pandora, because all they who dwelt on Olympus gave each a gift, a plague to men who eat bread.

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Hope as a cursed, female gift Hesiod, *Works and Days*

- But when he had finished the sheer, hopeless snare, the Father sent the swift messenger of the gods, to take it to Epimetheus as a gift. And Epimetheus did not think on what Prometheus had said to him, bidding him never take a gift of Olympian Zeus, but to send it back for fear it might prove to be something harmful to men. But he took the gift, and afterwards, when the evil thing was already his, he understood. For ere this the tribes of men lived on earth remote and free from ills and hard toil and heavy sicknesses which bring the Fates upon men; for in misery men grow old quickly. But the woman took off the great lid of the jar with her hands and scattered, all these and her thought caused sorrow and mischief to men. Only Hope remained there in an unbreakable home within under the rim of the great jar, and did not fly out at the door; for ere that, the lid of the jar stopped her, by the will Zeus who gathers the clouds. But the rest, countless plagues, wander amongst men; for earth is full of evils, and the sea is full.

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Aristotle on Hope: Related to Courage

- Even though not every hopeful person is courageous, every courageous person is hopeful. Hopefulness creates confidence, which, if derived from the right sources, can lead to the virtue of courage.
- Hopefulness spurs us to the pursuit of the noble.
- *The coward, then, is a despairing sort of person; for he fears everything. The brave man, on the other hand, has the opposite disposition; for confidence is the mark of a hopeful disposition. (Nicomachean Ethics 3.7)*



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Stoicism: rather than hope, focus on virtue in the present

- *According to Seneca, we should avoid both fear and hope and instead focus on the present and cultivate tranquility of the soul.*
- Widely different though they are, the two of them march in unison like a prisoner and the escort he is handcuffed to. Fear keeps pace with hope. Nor does their so moving together surprise me; both belong to a mind in suspense, to a mind in a state of anxiety through looking into the future. Both are mainly due to projecting our thoughts far ahead of us instead of adapting ourselves to the present (Seneca, *Letters* 5.7–8)

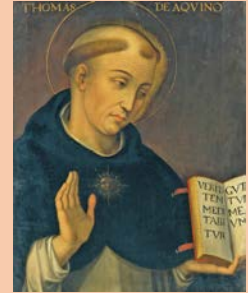


Seneca
5BCE - 65 CE

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Christian hope

- Paul describes Abraham as “hoping against hope” (Romans 4:18)
- Augustine
 - Hope: toward the future (v. faith = toward the past)
 - Interconnection of faith, hope, and love
 - Psychological/political hope: based on hope for eternal life and “the City of God”
- Aquinas
 - Faith precedes hope
 - Hope as passion is ambivalent (can be like drunkenness...)
 - Theological hope is not a passion → is a direction of the will
 - Theological hope is a gift of God’s grace
 - Despair is sinful



Aquinas
1225-1274

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Modern Philosophy: “Standard Account”

- Hope is uncertainty (cognitive) together with desire (conative/affective)
- Hobbes: hope is “justified expectation” (i.e., not merely wishful thinking)
 - But if it is “justified” is there uncertainty...?
- Spinoza: hope is irrational:
 - linked to misunderstanding of the necessary laws of nature and superstition
 - So: no uncertainty... if nature is deterministic

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Kant: Hope for “the highest good” = hoped for unity of morality and happiness

- Hope for happiness... based on hope for being/doing good (because only good deserves happiness).
- *Kant concludes, we may reasonably hope for happiness in proportion to morality only if we introduce the additional non-empirical assumption of “a highest reason, which commands in accordance with moral laws, as [...] the cause of nature”.* This way, Kant connects morality and happiness in the object of hope and secures its possibility in a highest reason, i.e., in God. Kant calls the connection between “happiness in exact proportion with the morality of rational beings, through which they are worthy of it” the highest good.
- Moral “postulates”: God and immortality (and freedom of the will) = hope for these as “transcendental” necessities of morality

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19th and 20th Century (existentialism)

- Kierkegaard: Hope is beyond ethics/reason = “paradox” = to hope for the eternal despite finitude/mortality
- Schopenhauer: hope is “Folly of the heart” that leads to frustration and dissatisfaction
- Nietzsche: hope is an illusion: a “rainbow” and an “illusory bridge”
- Camus: hope is absurd... struggle against illusion and despite mortality, finitude, and horror
- Marcel: despite finitude... hope:
 - “everything is not necessarily lost if there is no cure.”
- Pragmatism: meliorism... faith in democracy/human nature
 - James: “Meliorism treats salvation as neither necessary nor impossible. It treats it as a possibility”

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Contemporary questions

- Is hope really desire plus probability in conditions of uncertainty?
 - How much does rationality/possibility limit hope?
 - Ex: is it “hope” to have a desire to fly?
- Is hope only for the future?
 - Would it make sense to hope that the past were different?
- Can we hope for logical impossibilities or only physical possibilities?
 - Ex. hope for a round square?
 - Ex. hope for eternal life?
- Is hope entirely subjective? (Objectivity/universality of hope?)
 - How do we explain the fact that two different people may hope (or despair) differently?
- Do we have to be able to imagine/conceive the object of hope?
 - Ex. what do we hope for in eternal life?

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Contemporary questions

- Phenomenology of hope... and imagined future
 - Is hope about a future we can't imagine?
 - Or does hope actively imagine such a future in the present?
- Inspirational content?
 - Does hope have to motivate action? Is it really hope if it does not inspire action?
- Is hope a mental state—or is it a concept? Emotion or orientation?
- Instrumental value? When is hope helpful/dangerous?
 - Wishful thinking that is destructive vs. hopeful orientation toward the good?
 - Is hope always good (intrinsically valuable)?
- Is hope a “virtue”—of what kind?
 - Aristotle: personal/political virtue
 - Aquinas: theological

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Defining/Evaluating hope

Catherine Rioux

“Hope: Conceptual and Normative Issues” (2020)



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Standard view: hope is desire + uncertainty

- But also “investment” (connected to agential values and ends = existential)
- And phenomenology (degrees, varieties of what it feels like = experiential)
- Pettit: “cognitive resolve”: “strategic decision to “act as if”
- Milona: hope is “recalcitrant”... not a choice to act as if
- Martin: hope as “licensing” actions → incorporated into our planning, behavior
- Bovens: hope as “mental imaging”
- Milona: types and degrees of desire
- Is hope a desire, an emotion, or an evaluation/value?

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Evaluating hope: rational and irrational

- **Epistemic rationality:** is the hope reasonable (in light of evidence)
 - We should apportion degree of hope to the evidence
- **Practical rationality:** Instrumental Hope: Strategic hoping
 - Getting ourselves to hope can be practically useful
 - (cf. William James)
 - Does this depend on the epistemic rationality of the hope?
Or is the instrumental value of hope independent of its rationality?
- *The epistemic and practical dimensions of assessment can come apart: a given hope can be practically rational because it coheres well with one's overall set of ends, but epistemically irrational because constituted by a flawed probability assessment, and vice versa.*
- Fittingness: Stockdale and Milona: hope must fit the evidence and strategic value
 - *"fittingness is a function of both the "shape" and "size" of one's hope."*

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Criticizing hopes that are not "fitting" Not practically useful and epistemically irrational

- *If Milona and Stockdale are right, then we are entitled to criticize agents who pin strong hopes on highly unlikely outcomes, even when those hopes are practically rational and grounded in an accurate probability estimate.*
- *Considering the low probability for such hopes to materialize, agents would often be better off, from the practical point of view of promoting their overall schemes of ends, if they relinquished them.*

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Hope as motivational

→ Supports agency and action

- *The hopeful, by contrast, entertain an idea of the future containing success. Since such an idea enables them to act in line with their desires, and thus do what they already judge they ought to, hope can remove phenomenological, volitional barriers to rational action.*

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Basal hope: Existential

- An orientation, “existential feeling,” or “experiential backdrop”
- Cf. Kwong and Shade: “hopefulness” and “habits of hope”
- *Losing particular propositional hopes while maintaining basal hope is also possible...*

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Interpersonal hope

- *The kind of hope we “invest” or “place” in other people...*
 - Cf. Marcel: “I hope for us in thee”
- *Interpersonal hope that fails to materialize often gives rise to a singular feeling of “being let down by someone”*
- *Martin: “interpersonal hope centrally involves a desire for “extending one’s agency through another person” so as to produce a certain outcome, as well as a belief that outcome’s occurring through such an extension is possible.”*

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Ethics of interpersonal hope “ethics of giving and receiving hope”

- What if the other person does not share our desire (for them)?
 - What if a father hopes his daughter does X or becomes Y... but she doesn’t want it?
 - Ex. Religious Proselytizing
- Is a mutually shared desire for an outcome a precondition for interpersonal hope?
 - What if there are no shared desires? How can we create community and mutual hope?
- Should we guide other people’s hopes/desires through the hope that we invest in them?
 - What if a teacher/coach/parent wants you to do something that you do not yet understand or desire?
 - Stockdale: what if oppressor tries to control the hopes of those who are oppressed?
 - Bioethics: should nurses/doctors try to give patients hope?

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Hope in political philosophy

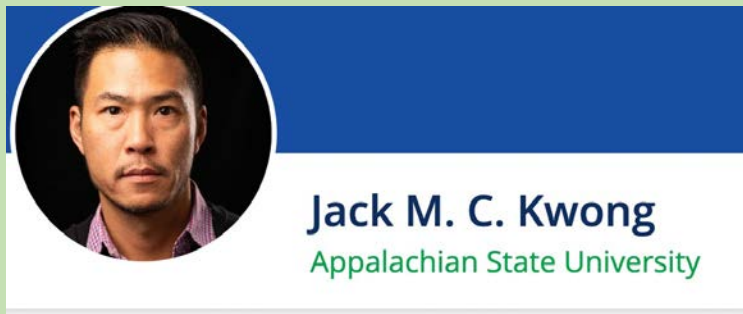
- Hope for institutions
- Hope that others obey/conform
- Hope that policies are effective

- Bloch: “militant optimism” → political commitment to good outcomes
- Rawls: “realistic utopia” (vs. idealistic utopianism)
- Democratic hope: that democracy can work
 - But Rorty: is this metaphysical or pragmatic?
- Stockdale: minimal hope (that oppression will end)

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Hope and hopefulness

Kwong, “The Phenomenology of Hope” (2022)



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Hoping that X is NOT the same as “being hopeful”

- *A person can hope for an outcome yet not feel hopeful that it will obtain. For example, the passenger who just learned that the plane has mechanical failure and will attempt a crashlanding from 10,000 ft. hopes that she will survive but certainly does not feel hopeful.*
- *The mere fact that a person hopes for an outcome does not mean that she is hopeful about it; on the contrary, she could be completely lacking in hopefulness and experience despair.*
- *A person can hope for an outcome without being hopeful about it.*

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We can hope for outcome and be despairing But hopefulness precludes despair

- *We can hope for an outcome over which we experience great despair. For instance, members of oppressed groups hope for racial justice and equality yet remain largely unhopeful that it will obtain. In short, where there is hopefulness, there cannot be despair. But where there is hoping, there can be.*

36

Hopefulness is positive

- *Being hopeful has an inherent positive and pleasant affective tone, especially when contrasted with despair, which is assuredly a negative attitude and a painful experience.*
- *Crucially, whereas hoping is directed at a desired outcome believed to be obtainable, hopefulness is directed at the chances that such an outcome will be obtained. To be hopeful is to have a positive orientation toward such chances, which is to have positive thoughts and feelings about them.*
- *Ex: to be hopeful during the pandemic that a vaccine will be found*

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Hopefulness can include some negativity But the positive outweighs the negative

- *Hopefulness does not imply the absence of negative thoughts and feelings. A hopeful person may occasionally entertain doubts or have bad feelings about a hoped-for outcome. However, these negative thoughts and feelings would give way to positive ones in a hopeful person. To be hopeful is to have on balance more positive thoughts and feelings than negative ones.*
- *Hopefulness, however a person comes by this attitude, is positively valenced and pleasant in its affective tone.*

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Hopefulness in the face of negativity/threats

- *A person can hope for an outcome that she perceives to be threatening and be hopeful that the threat will not materialize.*
- Fear/threats can prompt confidence, courage, self-reliance = “positive” valences”
- *When a person is not hopeful, she does not feel good about the chances that her hope will be realized.*
- Ex. Bess, the cancer patient
 - Her hopefulness can prevail despite the existential threat

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Hoping (Hope_v) is a “mental state” Vs. Hopefulness as an “emotion”

- Hoping is about probability and desire
 - = I think it is likely and I want it (MENTAL STATE)
- Hopefulness = emotion
- *There is little difficulty in making the case that hopefulness is an emotion. Understood as having good feelings and thoughts concerning the chances that a desired outcome will obtain, hopefulness has all of the basic properties of an emotion, being intentional, evaluative, affective, accompanied by bodily feelings, and motivational.*

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Hopefulness as an emotion

- Intentional: directed at some desired object
- Evaluative: looks favorable on the chances
- Affective: feelings are associated
- Motivational: it inspires action
- *To be hopeful is to be positively oriented toward the chances that the outcome will occur and accompanied by positive feelings and thoughts.*

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Conclusion:Fiala, Fresno Bee, April 2, 2023

<https://www.fresnobee.com/opinion/readers-opinion/article273804330.html#storylink=cpy>

- Hope and hopefulness can be cultivated
 - Not merely an emotion/passion
 - But a virtue/orientation
 - “Hopefulness is not merely an emotional state, beyond our control. Hopefulness is, rather, a virtue that controls our emotions. And we can learn to be hopeful.... We are not born knowing how to hope. We learn to be hopeful with support and education.”
- Related virtues: courage, persistence, resourcefulness (also gratitude and compassion.
 - “Hopefulness grows from tenacious and courageous activity. It also emerges from a sense of self that is enlarged by love”

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