

# 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."

Lecture Power points at:

<https://andrewfiala.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Hope-1-1.pdf>.

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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

Lecture Power points at:

<https://andrewfiala.com/lecture-powerpoints/>

April 18: <https://andrewfiala.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Hope-1-1.pdf>.

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## Hope and the meaning of life Rival Traditions and the Pragmatic Synthesis

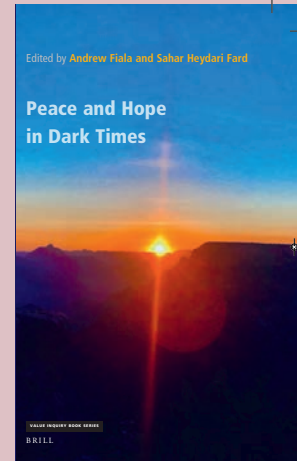
- Hope as essential
  - A theological virtue (along with love and faith)
    - Augustine
    - Martin Luther King and Jeremiah Wright
- Hope as an illusion
  - Stoicism: hope is irrational
  - Kant: hope as a necessary postulate of morality
  - Camus: hope is suicide
- Pragmatic Synthesis
  - Hope is an existential orientation and way of making meaning
    - James, Frankl, Marcel, Arendt

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## *From Peace and Hope in Dark Times*

### Fiala, “On Giving Birth to Hope in Darkness”

We might conclude with another source of hope, which is found in the vitality of the human spirit. Human beings are prolific. Even in the darkness, we are creative. We love, produce, innovate, and reproduce. The very fact that there will be a future generation, gives us reason to hope—and a reason to do our part. It is sobering to imagine how the future will judge us. The future will condemn us if we contribute to the darkness: hate and cruelty do not fare well in the eyes of future history.

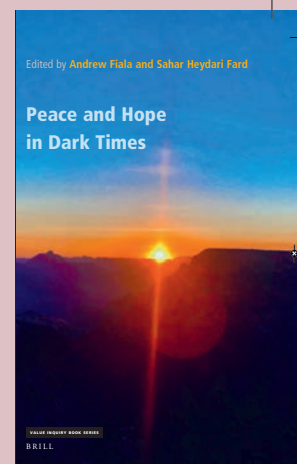


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## *From Peace and Hope in Dark Times*

### Fiala, “On Giving Birth to Hope in Darkness”

But the future will also judge us harshly if we remain static and succumb to fear and regret, which are often excuses for inaction and complicity. Rather than this, a glance to the future can inspire us to get to work, to build and to create. There is no certainty with regard to the future. But we can be sure that if there is going to be a light at the end of the tunnel, it is up to us to give birth to it.



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## Watt's painting, *Hope*



George Frederic Watts,  
*Hope* (1886) First Version



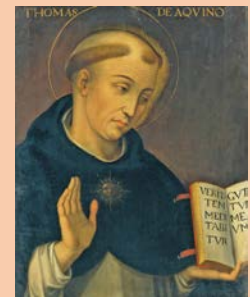
George Frederic Watts,  
*Hope* (1886) Second Version

- What does the painting tell us about hope?
- How do we know what it is trying to tell us?
- Is it accurate, useful, appropriate?

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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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## Source: The Apostle Paul (5 CE – 65 CE)

- Paul, *I Corinthians 13*
  - Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.
- So faith (*pistis*), hope (*elpis*), love (*agape*) abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love (*agape*).

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## Augustine, *Enchiridion* (Handbook) “On Faith, Hope, and Love”



**Augustine of Hippo**  
(354 – 430 CE)

- Wisdom = Piety
- Christian faith (in the Symbol/Creed)
- Christian hope (Eternal Life)
- The role of love (grace... and properly ordered desire)
- Prayer = What you hope for...

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## Augustine, *Enchiridion* Wisdom = Piety

- “God should be worshipped in faith, hope, love.”
  - ...fide, spe, caritate colendum Deum.
- “What should be believed, what should be hoped for, and what should be loved?”
- Christian faith = belief in Christ
- Faith in “the Symbol” = The Apostle’s Creed
  - A badge indicating who we are, what we believe, and what we value
- Hope in “the Lord’s Prayer”
  - Note: prayer as an expression of what we hope for

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## The Apostle’s Creed (Symbol)

- I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried, descended into hell, rose again from the dead on the third day, ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty, who will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

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## The Lord's Prayer (*oratio dominico*)

### Matthew 6: 9-13

- "Pray then like this: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'"
- **Augustine:** this tells us what to hope for: "In that life eternal--where we all hope to be--the hallowing of God's name, his Kingdom, and his will, in our spirit and body will abide perfectly and immortally."

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## Faith: past, present, and future

### Hope: future good

- Faith that Christ was resurrected
- Faith in life everlasting
- Faith that evil people will be punished and good people rewarded
- But Hope is futural: for eternal life and reward
  - Not hope for eternal punishment (that's negative so not hope)
  - Not hope that Christ was resurrected (that's past = faith)
- "Hope deals only with good things, and only with those which lie in the future."

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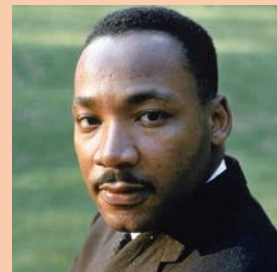
## Faith, hope, and love

- What, then, shall I say of love, without which faith can do nothing? There can be no true hope without love.
- Therefore, the apostle Paul approves and commends the faith that works by love and that cannot exist without hope. Thus it is that love is not without hope, hope is not without love, and neither hope nor love are without faith.

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## Martin Luther King, Jr. “Shattered Dreams” in Strength to Love

- What, then, is the answer? The answer lies in our willing acceptance of unwanted and unfortunate circumstances even as we still cling to a radiant hope, our acceptance of finite disappointment even as we adhere to infinite hope.



Martin Luther King, Jr.  
1929-1968

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## Vincent Lloyd, “A moral astigmatism: King on hope and illusion” (2018)

Hope is neither cheerfulness nor vague inspiration, but rather grave resilience that makes possible clear perception and right action.



Vincent Lloyd b. 1982

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Hope helps us see properly  
Without hope: “moral astigmatism”

- King vividly proclaims that, **for those without hope, “there is a moral astigmatism covering their lives and they can’t see reality.”**
- The language of astigmatism, rather than blindness, is important here, for those without hope have confidence that they can see. Yet the hopelessness makes them believe “the ugly beautiful and the beautiful ugly,” “the true false and the false true,” “the good appear evil and the evil appear good.”

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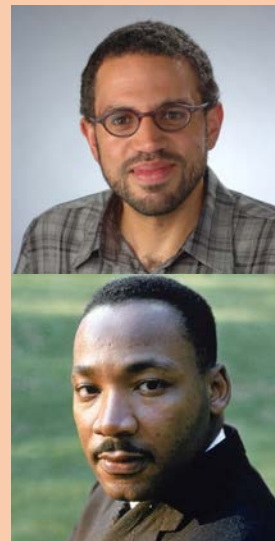
## King's hope is "grave resilience"

- Hope is neither cheerfulness nor vague inspiration, but rather grave resilience that makes possible clear perception and right action.
- Hopelessness motivates struggle that is ultimately self-interested and undisciplined. It strikes out in anger against those individuals and institutions that appear to be oppressive. In the language of "The Meaning of Hope," it suffers from "a moral astigmatism." Such struggle does not discern goodness, nor truth, nor beauty.

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## King's hope: seeing the goal pre-figured in the present... and inspiring struggle

- The object of hope, a world of peace and freedom, is certain to be realized—because, in King's idiom, he believes in God. But it is not just that "there are better days ahead." It is not just that the passing of time necessarily improves the conditions of the world, or the nation. Rather, **we are capable of envisioning that world to come in the present, as it is prefigured in the present, and we are capable of steadfastly pursuing it.**



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## Jeremiah Wright, “The Audacity to Hope” (1990)

- As you look closer, the illusion of power gives way to the reality of pain.
- War, famine, gluttony, inequality, apartheid...
- That is the world on which the woman sits in Watt's painting.



Jeremiah Wright, b. 1941  
Pastor at Trinity United  
Church of Christ in Chicago

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## Wright on Watt's painting, *Hope* *Hope despite the quiet hell of life...*



George Frederic Watts,  
*Hope* (1886) Second Version

- A closer look reveals all the harp strings but one are broken or ripped out. Even the instrument has been damaged by what she has been through, and she is the classic example of quiet despair. Yet the artist dares to entitle the painting Hope. The illusion of power—sitting on top of the world—gives way to the reality of pain.
- And isn't it that way with many of us? We give the illusion of being in an enviable position on top of the world. Look closer, and our lives reveal the reality of pain too deep for the tongue to tell. For the woman in the painting, what looks like being in heaven is actually an existence in a quiet hell.

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## The Vertical Dimension



George Frederic Watts,  
*Hope (1886) Second Version*

- In spite of being in a world torn by war.....

...she had the audacity to make music and praise God. The vertical dimension balanced out what was going on in the horizontal dimension.

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## The Vertical dimension



George Frederic Watts,  
*Hope (1886) Second Version*

- That is the real story here... her vertical dimension. She had the audacity to keep on hoping and praying when there was no visible sign on the horizontal level that what she was praying for, hoping for, and waiting for would ever be answered in the affirmative.

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## Hope against hopelessness



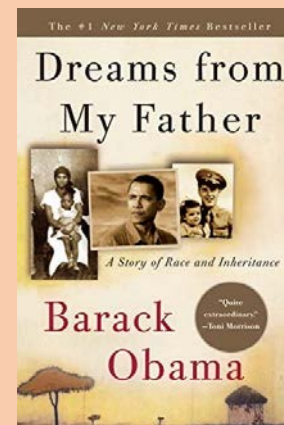
George Frederic Watts,  
*Hope* (1886) Second Version

- How to hope when the love of God is not plainly evident. It's easy to hope when there are evidences all around of how good God is. But to have the audacity to hope when that love is not evident...
- To take the one string you have left and to have the audacity to hope—make music and praise God on and with whatever it is you've got left, even though you can't see what God is going to do—that's the real word God will have us hear from this passage and from Watt's painting.
- Hope is what saves us. Keep on hoping; keep on praying. God does hear and answer prayer.

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## Obama, *Dreams from my Father* (1995)... Describing Wright's Sermon... A Fallen World

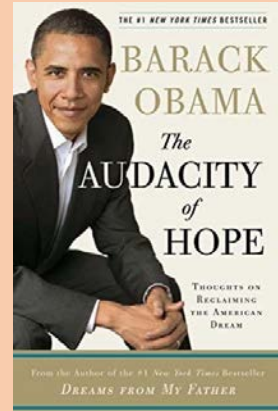
- The title of Reverend Wright's sermon that morning was "The Audacity of Hope."
- ...apartheid in one hemisphere, apathy in another hemisphere...
- That's the world! On which hope sits!"  
And so it went, a meditation on a fallen world.



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## Obama, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (1995)

- The audacity of hope. That was the best of the American spirit, I thought — having the audacity to believe despite all the evidence to the contrary that we could restore a sense of community to a nation torn by conflict



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## Stoicism: Hope is an illusion/superstition

- Epictetus's *Enchiridion* (= the handbook)
  - Epictetus (d. 135 CE)
  - "Don't hope that events will turn out the way you want, welcome events in whichever way they happen: this is the path to peace."
- Seneca (4 BCE – 65 CE), *Letters to Lucilius*
  - Seneca "You will cease to fear," he [Hecaton of Rhodes] says, "if you cease to hope."
  - "These two that are so different nonetheless go along together: where hope goes, fear follows... Both belong to the mind that is in suspense"
- Spinoza: hope is irrational:
  - Linked to misunderstanding of the necessary laws of nature and superstition
  - No uncertainty... if nature is deterministic

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## Leibniz on Stoicism: Patience without Hope “Letter to Molanus” (in Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*)

- The supreme good, according to the Stoics... is to act in accordance with virtue or prudence, and the pleasure resulting from this resolution is properly the tranquility of soul or indifference that both the Stoics and Epicureans sought for and recommended... But it seems to me that this art of patience, which constitutes the art of living... is not yet everything.
- **Patience without hope cannot last and scarcely consoles.**
- It is in this that Plato, in my opinion, surpasses all others, for he brings us to hope for a better life with good reason, and he is closest to Christianity.

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## Kant: Hope for unity of morality and happiness



**Immanuel Kant**  
**1724-1804**

- No proof of God or immortality
- BUT we ought to hope for this— because morality requires it

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## Kant: reasonable hope That we can improve ourselves (even after death)

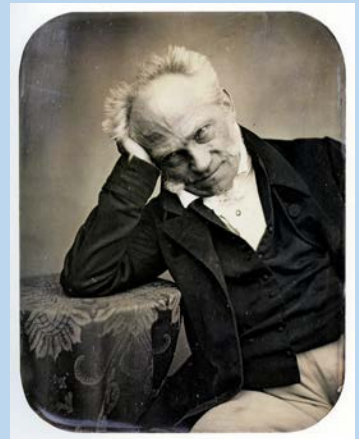
- If the moral law commands that we ought now to be better men, it unavoidably follows that we can now be better men.
- He must be able to **hope** to reach the road that leads to it—the road pointed out to him by a fundamentally improved disposition—and to do this through his own efforts.
- Against this demand for self-improvement, reason brings in all sorts of ignoble religious ideas.
- Indeed, if after this life I'm to enter into another one, although the circumstances there may (for all I know) be utterly unlike those of this life, I can still hope that the underlying principle will keep me on this path and bring me ever nearer to the unreachable goal of perfection.



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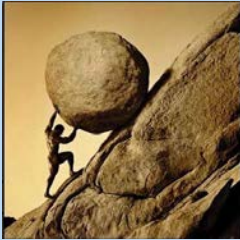
## 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century (existentialism)

- 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 philosophical suicide...



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## Camus, *Myth of Sisyphus* 1942



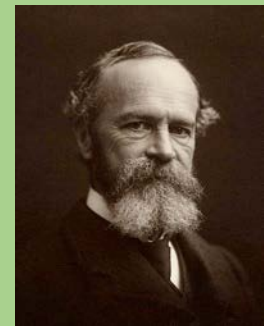
Albert Camus  
1913-1960

The absurd man thus catches sight of a burning and frigid, transparent and limited universe in which nothing is possible but everything is given, and beyond which all is collapse and nothingness. He can then decide to accept such a universe and draw from it his strength, his refusal to hope, and the unyielding evidence of a life without consolation.

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## William James, “Is Life Worth Living?” (1895)

- Pessimism is essentially a religious disease... The contradiction between the phenomena of Nature and the craving of the heart to believe that behind Nature there is a spirit whose expression Nature is.
- There gradually steals over us, instead of the old warm notion of a man-loving Deity, that of an awful Power that neither hates nor loves, but rolls all things together meaninglessly to a common doom.



William James  
(1842-1910)

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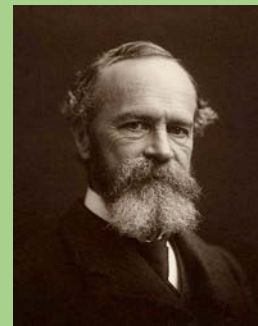
## James's Pragmatic Faith ("as if" Religion)

- Faith in the existence of an unseen order of some kind in which the riddles of the natural order may be found explained.
- We have a right to believe that the physical order is only a partial order ; we have a right to supplement it by an unseen spiritual order which we assume on trust, if only thereby life may seem to us better worth living again.

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## James: You can make your life worth living

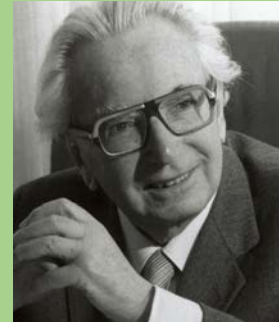
- This life is worth living, we can say, since **it is what we make it**, from the moral point of view, and we are determined to make it from that point of view, so far as we have anything to do with it, a success.
- Be not afraid of life. **Believe that life is worth living, and your belief will help create the fact.**



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## Victor Frankl, “Tragic Optimism” *Man’s Search for Meaning* (1984)

- Tragic Triad: Pain, Guilt and Death
- What matters is to make the best of any given situation...
- The reason I speak of a tragic optimism, that is, an optimism in the face of tragedy and in view of the human potential which at its best always allows for:
  - (1) turning suffering into a human achievement and accomplishment;
  - (2) deriving from guilt the opportunity to change oneself for the better; and
  - (3) deriving from life's transitoriness an incentive to take responsible action.



Victor Frankl  
1905-1997

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## Frankl: Three ways to “arrive at meaning”

- The first is by creating a work or by doing a deed.
- The second is by experiencing something or encountering someone; in other words, meaning can be found not only in work but also in love...
- Most important, however, is the third avenue to meaning in life: even the helpless victim of a hopeless situation, facing a fate he cannot change, may rise above himself, may grow beyond himself, and by so doing change himself. **He may turn a personal tragedy into a triumph.**
- Edith Weisskopf-Joelson: **“to be proud of his suffering** and to consider it ennobling rather than degrading” so that “he is not only unhappy, but also **ashamed of being unhappy.**”

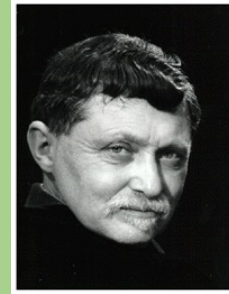
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## Gabriel Marcel

### *Homo Viator*

#### “Sketch of a Phenomenology and Metaphysic of Hope” (1942)

- Man is a traveler, voyager, on a journey or adventure...
- Hope is for the soul what breathing is for the living organism. Where hope is lacking the soul dries up and withers.
- The soul always turns towards a light which it does not yet perceive, a light yet to be born in the hope of being delivered from its present darkness.
- **I hope in thee for us.**
- The divine light-heartedness of life in hope.

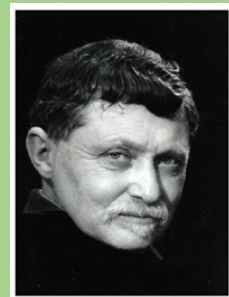


**Gabriel Marcel**  
1889-1973

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## Marcel

- Hope is a mystery = involves my own existence
- Hope is social = I hope in thee for us
- Hope is based on agape/love = the ego alone has no hope
- Hope liberates and transfigures
- *Here we undoubtedly come once again upon the theme of liberation, for it is never a simple return to the status quo, a simple return to our being, it is that and much more, and even the contrary of that: an undreamed-of promotion, a transfiguration.*



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## Hannah Arendt

### *The Human Condition* (1958)

The new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting. In this sense of initiative, an element of action, and therefore of natality, is inherent in all human activities. Moreover, since action is the political activity par excellence, natality, and not mortality, may be the central category of political, as distinguished from metaphysical, thought.



Hannah Arendt  
1906-1975

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## Arendt: Miracle of natality = hope

- The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, "natural" ruin is ultimately the tact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born. Only the full experience of this capacity can bestow upon human affairs faith and hope.



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## Conclusions

- Christianity: Hope, Faith, and Love
- Stoic/Existential Anti-Hope
- Pragmatic: Self-Help Hope
  
- Fiala: “the vitality of the human spirit”
  - “There is no certainty with regard to the future. But we can be sure that if there is going to be a light at the end of the tunnel, it is up to us to give birth to it.”

