

# 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/lecture-powerpoints/>

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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/>

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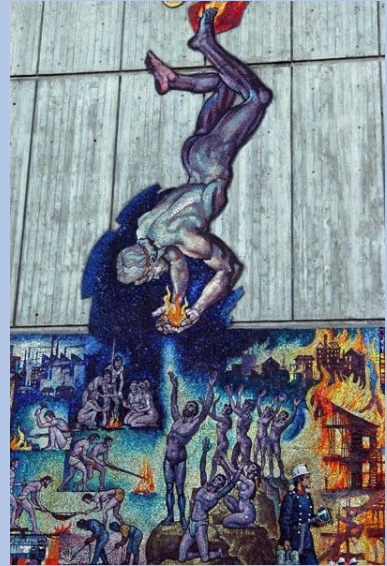
## Questions

- Is hope an illusion or a delusion?
  - Illusion: a mistaken perception...
  - Delusion: a dangerously mistaken idea...
- What is the difference between hope and 'wishful thinking'?
- What is the use of delusions/illusion in life?
- Can it be wise to hope against hope?
- What is the difference between optimism and meliorism?
- How is hope related to morality, and to living well?


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## Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound* Prometheus vs. Zeus

- **Prometheus:** But of wretched mortals he took no notice, desiring to bring the whole race to an end and create a new one in its place. Against this purpose none dared make stand except me— I only had the courage; I saved mortals so that they did not descend, blasted utterly, to the house of Hades.
- **I caused mortals to to cease foreseeing their doom....**  
**I caused blind hopes to dwell within their breasts....**  
**In addition, I gave them fire.**



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Hope is a delusion; no hand can grasp a wave or a shadow.

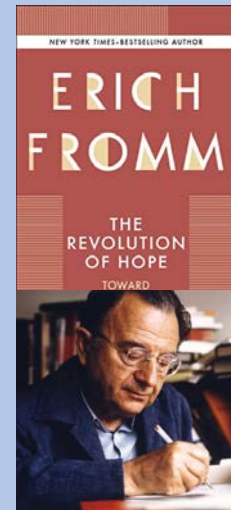
~ Victor Hugo

AZ QUOTES

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## Erich Fromm, The Revolution of Hope (1968)

- Hope is paradoxical. It is neither passive waiting nor is it unrealistic forcing of circumstances that cannot occur.... To hope means to be ready at every moment for that which is not yet born, and yet not become desperate if there is no birth in our lifetime. There is no sense in hoping for that which already exists or for that which cannot be. Those whose hope is weak settle down for comfort or for violence; those whose hope is strong see and cherish all signs of new life and are ready every moment to help the birth of that which is ready to be born.



Erich Fromm  
1900-1980

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## Alan vs. Bess “Cancer Research” case/example

- Clinical trial with one percent chance of being cured
- Alan
  - “Glass half empty” attitude
  - Knows it is unlikely he’ll be cured
  - Enrolls in the trial to help others
- Bess
  - “Hopes against hope”
  - Fantasizes about being cured
  - Enrolls in the trial to get cured
- Who is wiser, more hopeful?

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## Charlie and the Lottery Ticket

- Charlie buys lottery tickets every week
- He knows that the chances of winning are bad (1 in 15 million)
- But every time he buys the ticket, he feels hopeful...
- Is Charlie wise? Or deluded?
- Is Charlie any different than Bess or Alan?

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## Kant, “What May I Hope For?”



**Immanuel Kant**  
1724-1804

- What can I know?
  - Epistemology
- What should I do?
  - Ethics
- What may I hope for?
  - Metaphysics/Religion

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## Against superstitious “illusory” religion *Religion within the limits of Reason Alone* (1793)

- *Anything other than good life-conduct that a man supposes that he can do to become well-pleasing to God is mere religious illusion and pseudo-service of God.*

### On The Lord’s Prayer

- There’s nothing in it but the resolution to live a morally good life; and that, combined with our awareness of our frailty, carries with it the persistent wish to be a worthy member of the kingdom of God.
- The project of trying to divert God from the plan of his wisdom (in our favor) by insistently battering him with requests—that is not only a preposterous but also a **presumptuous illusion!**



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## Against fetishism/sorcery → external rituals are illusions

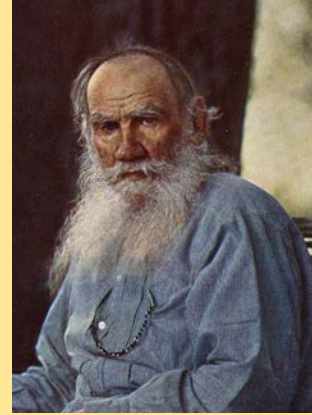
- Now the man who performs actions with nothing intrinsically God-pleasing (nothing moral) about them, as a means to earning immediate divine approval of himself and thereby the attainment of his desires, is under the illusion that he possesses an art of bringing about a supernatural effect by wholly natural means. I’ll call such attempts **fetishism**. (A more usual term is **sorcery**...)
- If he thinks that ceremonial actions that in themselves seem to contain nothing moral or well-pleasing to God will serve as a means—even as a condition—of getting the satisfaction of his wishes directly from God, then he is a victim of **illusion**.



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## The inner revolution

- The revolution must be a moral one based upon the regeneration of the inner man.
- And while everyone thinks of changing the world, no one thinks of changing himself.
- Leo Tolstoy



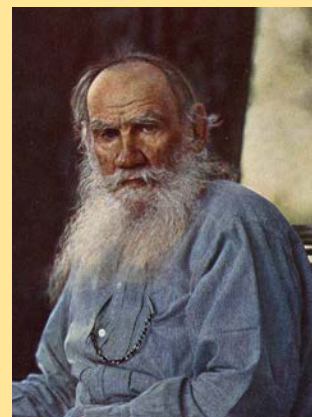
**Leo Tolstoy**  
**1828-1910**

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## Hope more than knowledge

Man needs hope as much if not more than he needs knowledge — that he suffers abominably from the uncertainty he is in concerning the things of most interest to him, that he is ever in quest of a better state than that in which he now exists.

--Leo Tolstoy

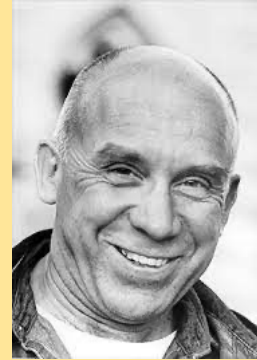


**Leo Tolstoy**  
**1828-1910**

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## Thomas Merton, "Sentences on Hope" In *No Man Is An Island* (1955)

- He who hopes in God trusts God whom he never sees, to bring him to the possession of things that are beyond imagination.
- Supernatural hope is the virtue that strips us of all things in order to give us possession of all things.
- By hope we possess God without feeling His presence.

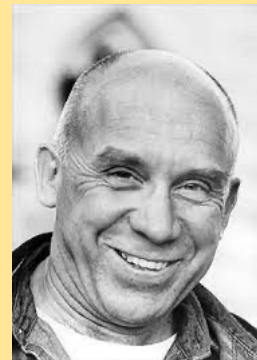


**Thomas Merton**  
1915-1968

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## Thomas Merton, "Sentences on Hope" In *No Man Is An Island*

- Hope is proportionate to detachment. It brings souls into the state of the most perfect detachment. In doing so, it restores all values by setting them in their right order. Hope empties our hands in order that we may work with them.

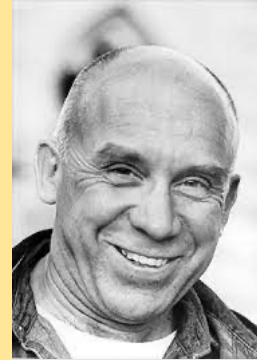


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## Thomas Merton, "Sentences on Hope" *In No Man Is An Island*

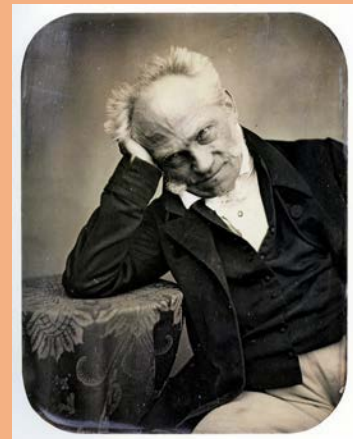
- If, instead of trust in God, I trust only in my own intelligence, my own strength, and my own prudence, the means that God has given to me to find my way to Him will all fail me. Nothing created is of an ultimate use without hope. To place your trust in visible things is to live in despair.



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## Schopenhauer's pessimism

- To obtain something we have desired is to find out that it is worthless; we are always living in the expectation of better things, while, at the same time, we often repent and long for things that belong to the past.
- And so it may be said of man in general, that befooled by hope, he dances into the arms of death.
- Then again, there is the insatiability of each individual will; every time it is satisfied a new wish is engendered, and there is not end to its eternally insatiable desires.

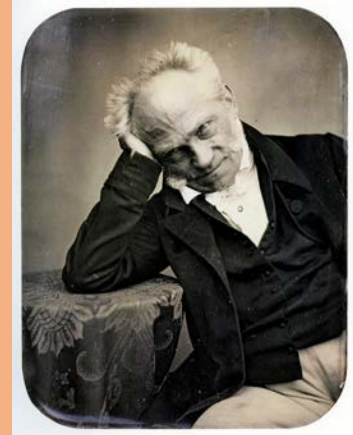


**Arthur Schopenhauer**  
1788-1860

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## Schopenhauer's pessimism

- We are driven by pain/desire
  - Pain/desire is "positive" and "felt immediately"
  - Happiness/pleasure is "negative" = the "annulment of pain"
    - Happiness/pleasure does not last
- This should cause despair
- BUT hope keeps us moving = the life instinct
- "We are instinctively more inclined to hope than to fear; just as our eyes turn of themselves to light in preference to darkness"



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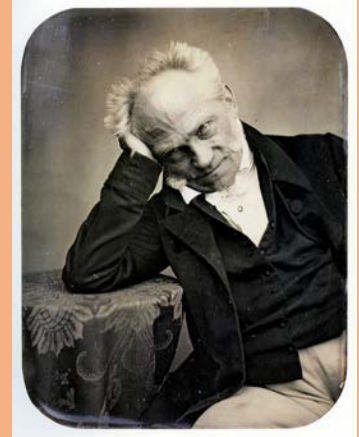
## Schopenhauer's pessimism

- Hope is to confuse the desire that something should occur with the probability that it will. Perhaps no man is free from this folly of the heart, which deranges the intellect's correct estimation of probability to such a degree as to make him think the event quite possible, even if the chances are only a thousand to one. And still, an unexpected misfortune is like a speedy death-stroke; while a hope that is always frustrated, and yet springs into life again, is like death by slow torture.

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## Schopenhauer's pessimism On the desperate and desperation

- He who has given up hope has also given up fear; this is the meaning of the expression desperate.
- It is natural for a man to have faith in what he wishes, and to have faith in it because he wishes it. If this peculiarity of his nature, which is both beneficial and comforting, is eradicated by repeated hard blows of fate, and he is brought to a converse condition, when he believes that something must happen because he does not wish it, and what he wishes can never happen just because he wishes it; this is, in reality, the state which has been called desperation.

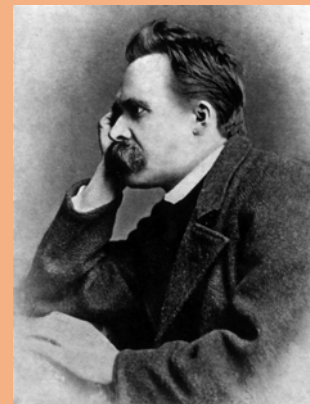


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## Nietzsche's "Rainbow Bridge"

Hope is a rainbow  
Leaping over a roaring river,  
Veiling with its sweetness and audacity  
The perilous abyss.

- -An aphorism from Nietzsche

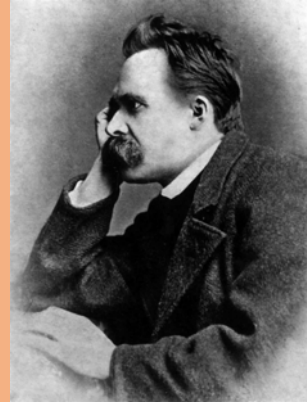


Friedrich Nietzsche  
1844-1900

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## Nietzsche's "Joyful Wisdom" (1882)

- "Joyful Wisdom": that implies the Saturnalia of a spirit which has patiently withstood a long, frightful pressure—patiently, strenuously, impassionately, without submitting, but without hope—and which is now suddenly overpowered with hope, the hope of health, the *intoxication* of convalescence. What wonder that much that is unreasonable and foolish thereby comes to light.
- *What makes Heroic?*—To face simultaneously one's greatest suffering and one's highest hope



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## Nietzsche's "Superman" *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883)

- Let your love to life be love to your highest hope; and let your highest hope be the highest thought of life!
- Your highest thought, however, ye shall have it commanded unto you by me—and it is this: man is something that is to be surpassed.



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## Nietzsche's "Superman" *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

- Man shall be trained for war, and woman for the recreation of the warrior: all else is folly.
- Too sweet fruits—these the warrior liketh not. Therefore liketh he woman;—bitter is even the sweetest woman.
- Better than man doth woman understand children, but man is more childish than woman.
- In the true man there is a child hidden: it wanteth to play. Up then, ye women, and discover the child in man!
- A plaything let woman be, pure and fine like the precious stone, illumined with the virtues of a world not yet come.
- Let the beam of a star shine in your love! Let your hope say: "May I bear the Superman!"

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## Optimism, Pessimism, Realism, Hope

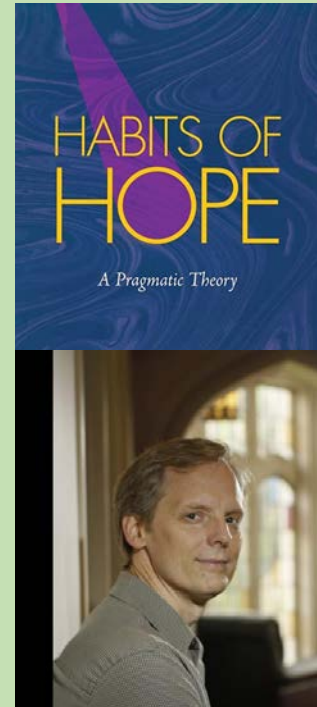
- Optimism: this is the best of all possible worlds
- Pessimism: this is the worst of all possible worlds
- Realism: hope for the best, prepare for the worst
- Meliorism: we can make this world better
- Epistemological, Metaphysical, and Ethical Questions



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## Pat Shade, *Habits of Hope* (2001)

- Habits of hope are those vital abilities which directly and indirectly nurture our commitment to and realization of remote, obstructed ends.
- Chief among them are persistence, general resourcefulness, and courage.



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## Pragmatic/Creative Hope

- Hope is not a mysterious force imbued with supernatural power which allows us to transcend any and every condition, but rather a creative ability whereby we overcome limitations and transform ourselves and our environment.



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## Meliorism vs. Optimism

### Active Participation in growth

- The optimist has a spectator's assurance that things will work out for the best. The meliorist, by contrast, knows that the fate of goodness depends in part on our own contribution. The vital ingredient is our own ongoing active participation. The life of hope has a special power to draw us on beyond ourselves, yet in its essence it is not something that transcends human abilities and capabilities.
- This is the pragmatic meliorist faith. The life of hope requires that we nurture it.



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## Meliorism vs. Optimism

### Active Participation in growth

- A far more vibrant picture is the meliorist one in which we are members of the family of God, contributors whose actions matter and play an important, if not decisive, role in the fruition of goodness and meaning. There is much that we can individually and collectively do to build up the life of hope, so that hope is a companion in our darkest hours.



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## Fiala, “Playing a Requiem on the Titanic” (2015)

- The quiet dignity of the musicians on the foundering Titanic.
  - Vs. Nero fiddling while Rome burns



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## Fiala, “Playing a Requiem on the Titanic” (2015)

- Even in a hopeless state, we can retain our dignity, maintain moral equilibrium and find small ways to make the world better. In the face of catastrophe, it may be reasonable to give up idealistic hope for a miraculous rescue. But hopefulness and associated virtues are essential components of find a moral path through the teeth of calamity



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## Deontological (Kantian) and Virtue Ethics (Stoicism)

- The worse things are, the more hope is needed; however, as things become worse, hope appears to become irrational. At some point, it is rational to give up hope. And yet, morality of a certain sort—that which is **based upon duty and virtue**—appears to require hopefulness, despite its irrationality.
- Kantian “Moral Imperative of Hope” = beyond consequentialism = transcendental
- Virtue “As human beings, we have an obligation to ourselves and to other to behave, nobly, courageously, and hopefully, even in the teeth of disaster.”

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## Not Optimism—but Meliorism

- Things can be ameliorated = made better (not perfect...)
- Metaphysical Hope (God will fix it...)
  - But danger of despair if God does not fix it
  - And danger of doing nothing... because God will fix it
  - Fiala: “Metaphysical optimism is an unreliable guide for ethical action.”

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## How do you want your life to be remembered?

- As Nero fiddling... or as the Musicians on the Titanic?
- Nihilism risks making things worse
- Morality requires that we “fend off despair”
  - Take finite steps to preserve some good for the future (intergenerational justice)
  - And work to make things better for the poor (environmental justice)

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## Fiala Conclusion

- Stoic resolve and courageous virtue are ends in themselves. At some point, death comes to us all—to individuals, to civilizations, and to species. We can choose how we respond to the face of calamity—just as we can choose how we respond to the facticity of death.

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## Fiala Conclusion

- Each action we take contributes to the story of our lives. While we may have to give up hope for a rescue and return to the pristine world of our ancestors, we cannot give up hopefulness as a positive disposition and virtue. Our actions matter—here and now—to ourselves, to suffering others, and to those we love. We must do our best to do our work—to take appropriate action, give hope to others, and behave properly—even if we are playing a requiem on the Titanic.