

Philosophical Explorations of Hope

Apr. 18, 25, May 2, 9

3 - 4:30 p.m.

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1

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/>

2

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/>

3

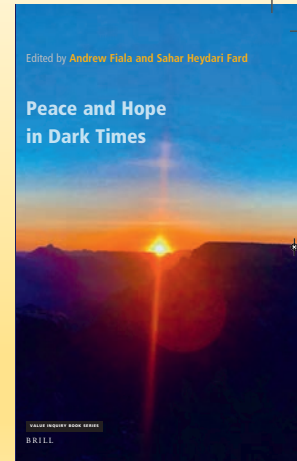
Questions/Themes

- How does hope function in politics?
- The hope of the Emersonians? Should we hope for the genius, poet, great friend?
- The hope of the revolutionaries: should we hope for things to get worse, so they can get better?
- How does the dominant class profit from the hopelessness of the masses?
- Is hope a marketing ploy?
- Concluding thoughts about hope as light, dance, play

4

From Peace and Hope in Dark Times Fiala, "On Giving Birth to Hope in Darkness"

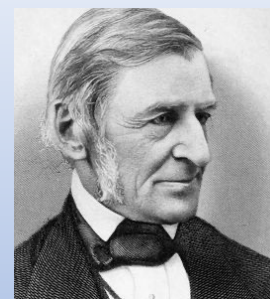
Fear (along with hate, violence, and cruelty) are states of mind that prowl the darkness. Nostalgia (and related aspects of remembrance such as grief and regret) are static states that keep us wedded to the past. But hope is a kind of light and dynamism. It is an expectant and bright opening toward the future. It is not passive; it is active. It is not quiet; it is vocal. It is not afraid of the darkness. Rather, it offers courage and encouragement.



5

Emersonian hope Genius, creativity... the new

- The eyes of man are set in his forehead, not in his hindhead. Man hopes. Genius creates.
 - The American Scholar
- We walk alone in the world. Friends, such as we desire, are dreams and fables. But a sublime hope cheers ever the faithful heart, that elsewhere, in other regions of the universal power, souls are now acting, enduring and daring, which can love us, and which we can love.
 - Friendship
- No truth so sublime but it may be trivial to-morrow in the light of new thoughts. People wish to be settled: only as far as they are unsettled is there any hope for them.
 - Circles



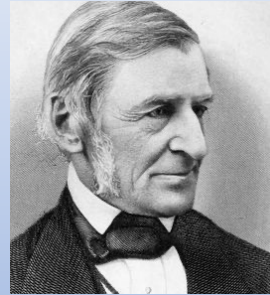
Ralph Waldo Emerson
1803-1882

6

Emerson, "Circles"

The hope of a new man... vs. mortal limitations

- Men cease to interest us when we find their limitations. The only sin is limitation. As soon as you once come up with a man's limitations, it is all over with him. Has he talents? has he enterprise? has he knowledge? it boots not. Infinitely alluring and attractive was he to you yesterday, a great hope, a sea to swim in; now, you have found his shores, found it a pond, and you care not if you never see it again.

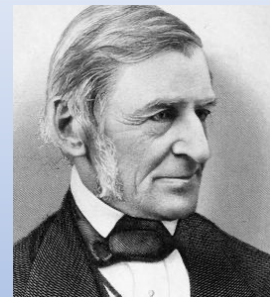


7

Emerson, "Circles"

Hopeless old age and hope for the new

- Nature abhors the old, and old age seems the only disease... conservatism, appropriation, inertia, not newness, not the way onward.
- Whilst we converse with what is above us, we do not grow old, but grow young. Infancy, youth, receptive, aspiring, with religious eye looking upward, counts itself nothing, and abandons itself to the instruction flowing from all sides.

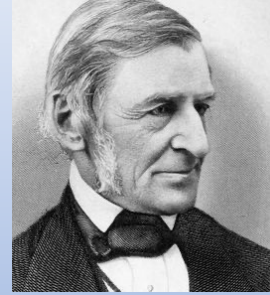


8

Emerson, "Circles"

Hopeless old age and hope for the new

- But the man and woman of seventy assume to know all, they have outlived their hope, they renounce aspiration, accept the actual for the necessary, and talk down to the young. Let them, then, become organs of the Holy Ghost; let them be lovers; let them behold truth; and their eyes are uplifted, their wrinkles smoothed, they are perfumed again with hope and power.

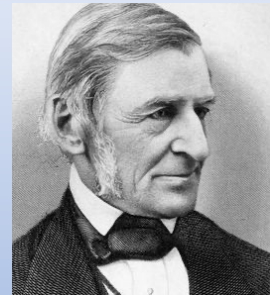


9

Emerson, "Circles"

Hopeless old age and hope for the new

- This old age ought not to creep on a human mind. In nature every moment is new; the past is always swallowed and forgotten; the coming only is sacred. Nothing is secure but life, transition, the energizing spirit. No love can be bound by oath or covenant to secure it against a higher love. No truth so sublime but it may be trivial to-morrow in the light of new thoughts. People wish to be settled; only as far as they are unsettled is there any hope for them.



10

Emily Dickinson, Hope is the thing with feathers

“Hope” is the
thing with
feathers

That perches in
the soul

And sings the
tune without the
words

And never stops
at all

And sweetest, in
the Gale, is heard

And sore must be
the storm

That could abash
the little Bird

That kept so
many warm

I’ve heard it in the
chillest land

And on the
strangest Sea

Yet, never in
Extremity,

It asked a crumb
of me.



Emily Dickinson
1830-1886

11

Poet of hope: Walt Whitman “Song of the Open Road”

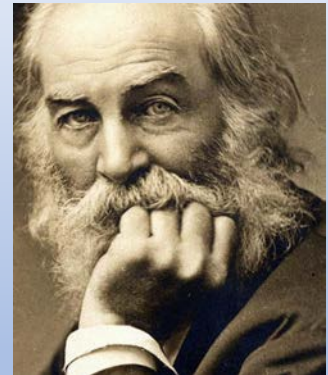
Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road,
Healthy, free, the world before me,
The long brown path before me leading wherever I
choose.

Henceforth I ask not good-fortune, **I myself am good-
fortune,**

Henceforth I whimper no more, postpone no more, need
nothing,

Done with indoor complaints, libraries, querulous
criticisms,

Strong and content I travel the open road.

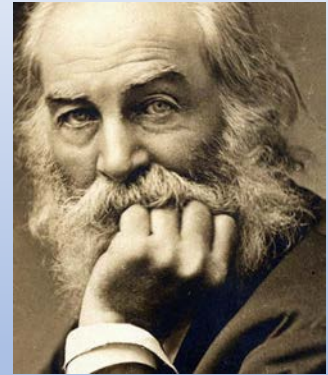


Walt Whitman
1819-1892

12

Poet of hope: Walt Whitman “Going Somewhere”

The sum, concluding all we know of old or modern learning, intuitions deep,
Of all Geologies—Histories—of all Astronomy—of Evolution,
Metaphysics all,
Is, that **we all are onward, onward, speeding slowly, surely bettering,**
Life, life an endless march, an endless army, (no halt, but it is duly over,)
The world, the race, the soul—in space and time the universes,
All bound as is befitting each—all surely going somewhere.



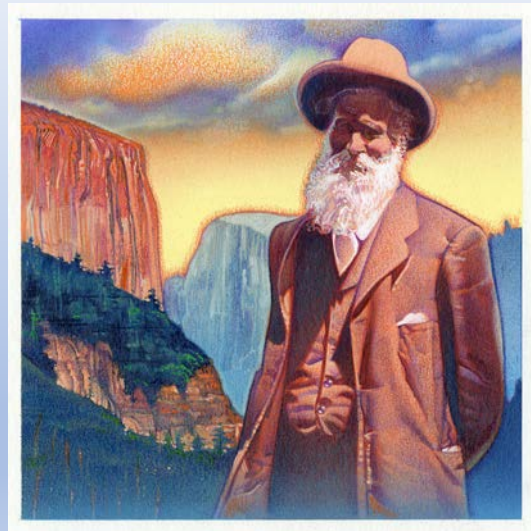
Walt Whitman
1819-1892

13

John Muir: Wild Hope

- In God's wildness lies the hope of the world - the great fresh unblighted, unredeemed wilderness. The galling harness of civilization drops off, and wounds heal ere we are aware.

- Alaska Journal (1890)



14

Edmundson on Whitman (2019)

- Perhaps what Whitman mainly offers is hope—the hope that this new form of social life can prosper and give people access to levels of happiness and freedom that they have never enjoyed. Whitman was not programmatically cheerful, not a grinning optimist. He was badly depressed when *Leaves of Grass* failed in its earliest incarnations to reach people. He was horribly downcast as he saw the Civil War gathering. But he never withdrew his hope that America could be a thriving nation not only for some, but for all of its people—and that the country would be an example for others across the world, should they choose to embrace it.

- <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/05/walt-whitman-leaves-of-grass-american-democracy/586045/>

15

Amanda Gorman, “The Hill We Climb”

We seek harm to none and harmony for all
 Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true:
 That even as we grieved, we grew
 That even as we hurt, we hoped
 That even as we tired, we tried



Amanda Gorman
 b. 1998

16

Amanda Gorman, “The Hill We Climb”

For while we have our eyes on the future
 History has its eyes on us
 This is the era of just redemption
 We feared at its inception
 We did not feel prepared to be the heirs
 Of such a terrifying hour
 But within it we found the power
 To author a new chapter
 To offer hope and laughter
 To ourselves
 So while once we asked,
 how could we possibly prevail over catastrophe?
 Now we assert
 How could catastrophe possibly prevail over us?

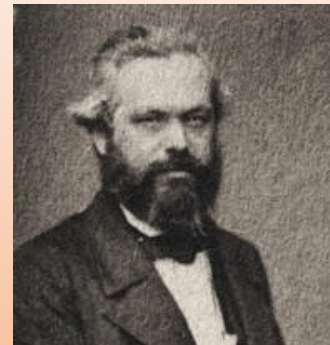


Amanda Gorman
 b. 1998

17

Karl Marx, Letter to Ruge (1843)

- For a despotism, brutality is necessary and humanity impossible. A brutal state of affairs can only be maintained by means of brutality.
-
- You will hardly suggest that my opinion of the present is too exalted and if I do not despair about it, this is only because its desperate position fills me with hope.

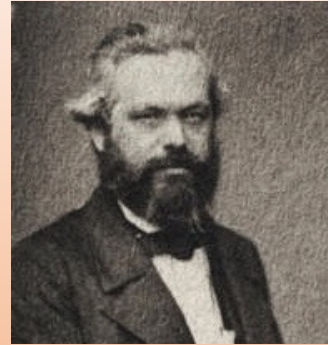


Karl Marx
 1818-1883
 (Here in 1861)

18

Karl Marx, Letter to Ruge (1843)

- The existence of a suffering mankind which thinks and of a thinking mankind which is suppressed must inevitably become unpalatable and indigestible.
- it is our task to drag the old world into the full light of day and to give positive shape to the new one. The more time history allows thinking mankind to reflect and suffering mankind to collect its strength the more perfect will be the fruit which the present now bears within its womb.



Karl Marx
1818-1883
(Here in 1861)

19

Giorgio Agamben: “Thought is the Courage of Hopelessness” (2014)

- The concepts pessimism and optimism have nothing to do with thought. Debord often cited a letter of Marx's, saying that 'the hopeless conditions of the society in which I live fill me with hope'. Any radical thought always adopts the most extreme position of desperation. Simone Weil said 'I do not like those people who warm their hearts with empty hopes'. Thought, for me, is just that: the courage of hopelessness. And is that not the height of optimism?



Giorgio Agamben
b. 1942

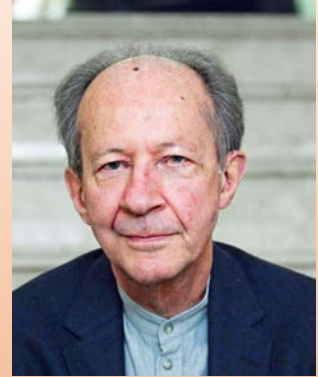
- <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/news/1612-thought-is-the-courage-of-hopelessness-an-interview-with-philosopher-giorgio-agamben>

20

Giorgio Agamben: “Thought is the Courage of Hopelessness” (2014)

- Man is always becoming human, and thus also remains inhuman, animal. Philosophy is not an academic discipline, but a way of measuring oneself up to this event that never stops taking place and which determines the humanity and inhumanity of mankind...

- <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/news/1612-thought-is-the-courage-of-hopelessness-an-interview-with-philosopher-giorgio-agamben>

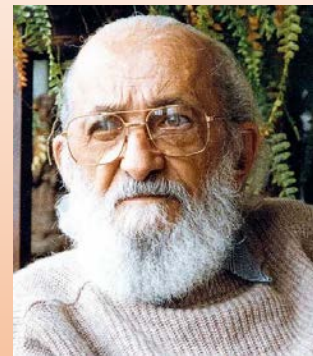


Giorgio Agamben
b. 1942

21

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), *Pedagogy of Hope* (1992)

- I do not understand human existence, and the struggle needed to improve it, apart from hope and dream. Hope is an ontological need. Hopelessness is but hope that has lost its bearing, and become a distortion of that ontological need.

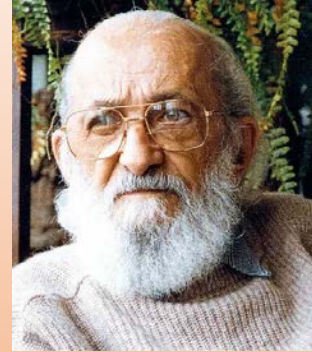


Paulo Freire
1921-1997

22

Freire: Hopelessness paralyzes social struggle

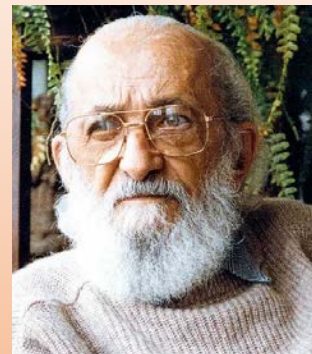
- When it becomes a program, hopelessness paralyzes us, immobilizes us. We succumb to fatalism, and then it becomes impossible to muster the strength we absolutely need for a fierce struggle that will re-create the world.
- Hopelessness of the masses
 - From corruption, oppression, disenchantment...
- → DOES THE DOMINANT CLASS PROFIT FROM THE HOPELESSNESS OF THE MASSES?



23

Hope is necessary, but not sufficient

- My hope is necessary, but it is not enough. Alone, it does not win. But without it, my struggle will be weak and wobbly. We need critical hope, the way a fish needs unpolluted water.
- The idea that hope alone will transform the world, and action undertaken in that kind of naivete, is an excellent route to hopelessness, pessimism, and fatalism.
- But the attempt to do without hope... is a frivolous illusion.



24

bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (2003)

- In the last twenty years, educators who have dared to study and learn new ways of thinking and teaching so that the work we do does not reinforce systems of domination, of imperialism, racism, sexism or class elitism have created a pedagogy of hope.
- Hopefulness empowers us to continue our work for justice even as the forces of injustice may gain greater power for a time. As teachers we enter the classroom with hope.
- My hope emerges from those places of struggle where I witness individuals positively transforming their lives and the world around them. Educating is always a vocation rooted in hopefulness.

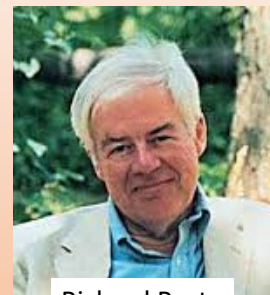


bell hooks
1952-2021
 (Gloria Jean Watkins)

25

Richard Rorty, Pragmatic, democratic utopia → More Happiness and Creativity

- A liberal democratic utopia, on the pragmatists' view, is no truer to human nature or the demands of an ahistorical moral law than is a fascist tyranny. But it is much more likely to produce greater human happiness. A perfected society will not live up to a pre-existent standard, but will be an artistic achievement, produced by the same long and difficult process of trial and error as is required by any other creative effort.
- *Philosophy and Social Hope* (1999)

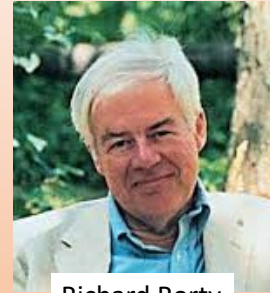


Richard Rorty
1931-2007

26

Richard Rorty, Social Hope of the Progressive Era

- The new social hopes which filled the nineteenth century helped them accomplish this transvaluation of traditional philosophical values, and the resulting philosophical pluralism reinforced the sense that a perfected society would make possible ever-proliferating human diversity. At the end of that century, it seemed entirely plausible that the human race, having broken through age-old barriers, was now about to create a global, cosmopolitan, social democratic, pluralist community.



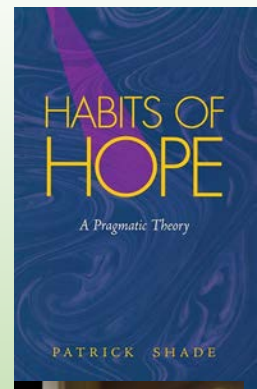
Richard Rorty
1931-2007

- *Philosophy and Social Hope* (1999)

27

Reciprocity of Hope Pat Shade, *Habits of Hope*

- We should expect hope's reciprocity as a natural flowering of the life of hope. Helping others and nurturing hope is expressive of hopefulness itself. It is an extension of the hopeful self to reach out to others, promoting the connection of agency and the enrichment of horizons of meaning. Hope's reciprocity grows out of the very social nature of hope; we thus frequently see it live in family relations, in intimacy, in love. And so hope spreads.

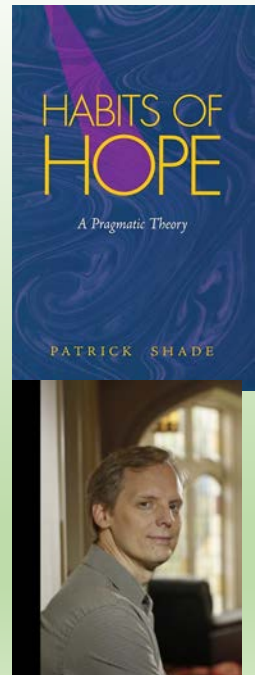


28

Reciprocity of Hope

Pat Shade, *Habits of Hope*

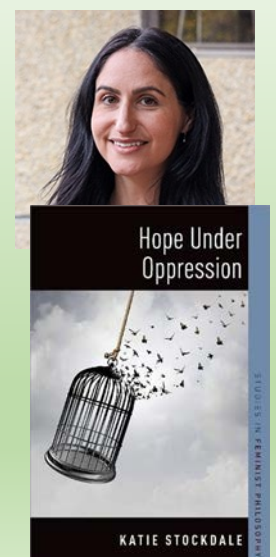
- Hopefulness itself, the jewel of the life of hope, radiates its own warmth, possessing an expansive and social dimension which, though it can characterize the self, does not belong solely to one individual person.



29

Katie Stockdale, *Hope Under Oppression* (2021)

- "Oppression is a threat to hope"
- Feminist approach to hope attends explicitly to who is hoping and the relative powers of agents in their capacities to affect the world.



30

Katie Stockdale, *Hope Under Oppression* (2021)

- An adequate understanding of hope requires attending explicitly to the various relations in which people are embedded and their lived experiences resulting from multiple and intersecting social features of the self.
- Not only can oppression threaten and diminish individuals' hopes for this or that outcome; it also threatens and damages the very ability to form and pursue those hopes.
- How can we hope to build a just world in the face of so many overlapping forms of oppression that are not going away any time soon?

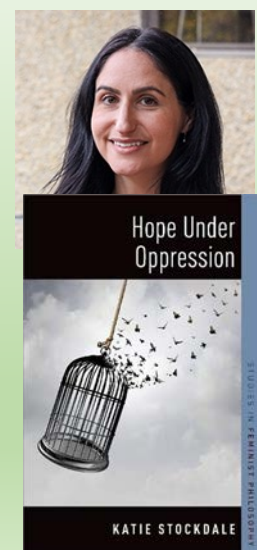


31

Katie Stockdale, *Hope Under Oppression* (2021)

Hoping in solidarity with other

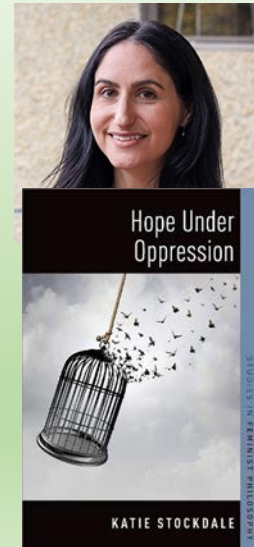
- Hoping well takes place in community with others who support and challenge our hopes for the better.
- We hope well with others, as we lean on them for support in pursuing our hopes and as we act as a support for others' hopes too. This practice keeps each of our hopes alive.



32

Katie Stockdale, *Hope Under Oppression* (2021)
 “Wishful Hope” = hope as marketing

- Politicians and, as we will see, corporations and other agents in positions of power employ the language of hope to further their ends. Hope is not just a mental state that exists in individual minds. It is also a political and marketing tool that influences human psychology and behavior.



33

Marketing Hope



34

Katie Stockdale, *Hope Under Oppression* (2021) “Wishful Hope” = hope as marketing

- Many people are vulnerable to wishful hope not because they are used to getting what they want without effort but because they are incapable (or feel incapable) of engaging their agency in ways that will increase the likelihood that their hope will be realized.
- Because members of oppressed groups often lack the power, resources, time, and energy to engage in activities that will increase the likelihood that their hopes will be realized, individuals and institutions in positions of power can exploit the wishful hopes of individuals living under oppressive conditions.



35

Fiala, *Hope: The Three Mountains*

Hope is enlightening and playful nonsense. It is a deliberate misinterpretation of reality. Hope slips past truth and fact. The essence of hope is freedom. Hope hovers above the truth, playing in the light.

Hope is not a mountain at all. Rather, it is the will to climb the mountain. It is the process of surmounting, growing, and opening.



36

Fiala, Hope: The Three Mountains

Hope is a dead limb flowering.
 Hope is a fish leaping upstream.
 Hope is a tail wagging behind the door.
 Hope is laughter at a funeral.
 Hope is love, even after loss.
 Hope is tomorrow, and the day after.
 It is the thing with feathers.
 It is the light at dawn.
 The dawn itself.



37

Fiala, Hope: The Three Mountains

These metaphors cannot say what we mean.
 Hope is not, after all, a thing. It is an action, a
 process, and a movement. It is not a noun,
 it is a verb.

Perhaps we would well to speak of “hoping”
 instead of “hope.” We make a mistake when
 we see hope as something to be possessed
 and pocketed. But hope cannot be grasped,
 nor water, nor light, nor life.

Hoping is a happening. It arises and lifts us,
 for a moment, dancing in the light.



38

Conclusion

- All things are known to the soul. It is not to be surprised by any communication. Nothing can be greater than it. Let those fear and those fawn who will. The soul is in her native realm, and it is wider than space, older than time, wide as hope, rich as love.
- Emerson, The Method of Nature