

A conference was held in Prague, Czech Republic, in November 2002 that was entitled “Issues Confronting the Post-European World” and that was dedicated to Jan Patočka (1907-1977). The Organization of Phenomenological Organizations was founded on that occasion. The following essay is published in celebration of that event.

Essay 23

Hoping against Hope¹

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Abstract

This essay is a phenomenological exploration of hope. First, I describe the experience of hope with respect to its temporality, and distinguish it from other future oriented acts like expectation. In the second part, I qualify the hope experience as an engagement. It is this engagement that, in part, differentiates it from other experiences like wishing and imagining. The third part of this essay takes up another essential feature of hope, namely, that it is an experience of being oriented toward an “other-than-myself.” This “other-than-myself” is evoked by the fact that hoping is experienced as not in my control. Such an other-than-myself is the ground of hope in the hope experience and enables hoping to be sustainable. The fourth part is devoted to this sustainability in hope, and is what distinguishes hoping, e.g., from longing-for, desiring, and other acts that are essentially centered in the “I,” as within my control. As engaged and sustainable, hope is described as taking place in excess of expectation, probability, improbability, and impossibility. This is also what distinguishes hope from denial (Part Five), since denial must posit (deny and accept a reality), whereas hope is experienced in the face of acceptance or denial. The final part of the essay takes up the issue of hope and hopelessness; it examines different situations in which hope may not function, but defines hopelessness as the experience of impossibility as such. In the face of impossibility, however, hope transforms the experience of the impossible such that something “only seems” impossible, making it precisely, hopeful.

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Hope is incontestably a basic human experience, and because it is so basic, the experience of hope can be all the more ambiguous. There are many theorists from various disciplines who have made the theme of hope a topic of research—e.g., Ernst Bloch, Gabriel Marcel, Jürgen Moltman²—just to name a few. Rather than take these or other works as the basis for research on hope, I hold their conclusions in abeyance and make an initial endeavor to discern some of the fundamental, structural features of hope. I do this by describing the experience of hope with respect to three central themes that bear on hope: temporality, the modality of possibility, and otherness. In particular, I describe hope as directed principally toward the future, as engaged and sustainable, and as oriented to what is beyond myself. As such, the experience of hope is essentially distinct from other experiences such as expectation, probability, wishing, longing, and denial, and is foundational for the experience of hopelessness.

For the purposes of this paper, let me make an initial observation. It is noted here as a presupposition and in demand of further explication in a longer work. Hope in general pertains to the dimension of “spirit.” It is not an anonymous function, but initiated from the dimension of “person.” Whether animals other than human persons “hope” is a question that has to be left open.

I. The Temporal Dimension of Hope as Future

One of the key features of hope is time. When we examine the temporality of hoping we notice that one temporal dimension stands out as essential, namely, the future. When I hope, I am oriented toward a futural open significance, most often (but not exhaustively) expressed in terms of some futural occurrence. Let me be more precise by beginning with some very simple examples. In drawing on instances of hope, I select mundane examples by design. I do this for two reasons. First, it is too easy to speak lightly of divine things, thereby making idols of them; and by the same token, we often give ourselves too much license to speak of things horrific, thereby fetishizing them. Second, I begin with so-called mundane examples because despair arises in a multitude of everyday events, and not only those that are only issues of life and death, and likewise, because hope, which

²Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*. Three Volumes. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1959). Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator: Introduction to a Metaphysic of Hope*, trans., Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962); Gabriel, “Desire and Hope,” trans., Nathaniel Lawrence, in *Readings in Existential Phenomenology*, ed., Nathaniel Lawrence and Daniel O’Connor (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1967). Jürgen Moltmann, *Theologie der Hoffnung* (Munich: Christian Kaiser, 1965).

emerges in the face of the impossible, contradicts the everyday desperate situations in ways that we often take for granted.

Let's say we are in the middle of winter and I hope that it will become sunny and warm outside; I hope to go cycling. The futural dimension is evident in such acts of hope. Notice that I cannot hope that it *was* warm or that I *went* cycling; similarly, I cannot hope that it is sunny *now* and that I am cycling *now*, when I experience it as actually sunny and warm and actually cycling. The actuality of the event in the present, and *mutatis mutandis*, the past, will either be the fulfillment or disappointment of hope, but it will not constitute the temporal orientation of the hope-act. A discussion of the structure of fulfillment and disappointment where hope is concerned would take us too far beyond the limits of this paper. Suffice it to say that the fulfillment of hope depends on the manner in which the hoped-for event arrives as corresponding to the way in which the hoped-for act was directed. Such a fulfillment of hope need not be instantaneous, but can be temporally extended or historically developed. We only need note here that if a hope is realized in the manner in which the event was hoped for, or if it does not occur at all, the hope will cease because it will have been either fulfilled in the manner appropriate to the hope, or disappointed.³

Still, one may object that there are instances in which we are oriented toward the present and the past in hope. For example, let's say that I was outside in inclement weather, and while still outside I say: "I hope I am not catching a cold now," or an hour later after returning indoors, "I hope that I had not caught a cold." Although it seems that the hoping relates to the present or the past, the hope-act actually bears on an open futural significance. This can be seen more clearly when we contrast hoping with wishing (I return to this distinction below). When I *wish* I had not caught a cold, I presuppose the pastness and accomplished reality of the event. I only wish it were not true or had not happened. By contrast, when I am living through the hope that I am not catching or had not caught a cold, the future significance of this event is experienced as open for me and not as determined or completed; it is not a *fait accompli*. It is such an openness that relates the hope experience to the future.

Having noted that hope pertains to the future, it remains to describe its unique kind of futural orientation. Within the phenomenological tradition, it is customary to discern temporal modes in terms of time-consciousness: either as "protention" or as "expectation." The question concerns the relation that obtains

³The range of fulfillment and disappointment where hope is concerned is a topic for future work. Provisionally, let me say that hoping is broader than the intention-fulfillment structure, such that the "fulfillment" of hope can overflow the bounds of any intention.

between these kinds of time-consciousness and hope. Is hope founded in expectation as a mode of time-consciousness or is hope a distinctive act?

Briefly put, protention is a functional, anonymous sketching out of the future that is based on a present occurrence and how that occurrence was retained as past. For example, as I take notes while reading a book, my bodily comportment is directed implicitly to what follows—from sitting on the chair, to the movement of my hands as I continue to read—all of which may be disappointed or fulfilled by the on-coming events. Now, as I interrupt my note-taking to sip a cup of coffee, I reach again for my pencil, still reading my book. The protentional threads of my hand guide me to where I last placed the pencil, and I go to grasp it, miss it, grasp it, miss it, and so forth. All this can go on implicitly while still concentrating on reading a passage. Though protention is functioning through and through taking me in this fumbling manner from one to the next, without any explicit cognition of this process—at least for the first few tries—there is no necessary engagement of hope. I may then get frustrated and turn my attention to the pencil, look around; at this point I may hope to find it again (because I need to record a thought), but the hope-act has a different orientation than that of the temporal, kinaesthetic process of protention.

Hope, however, has a closer affinity to expectation. Expectation is similar to protention insofar as it is open to a futural occurrence arriving in the present, and it is also unfurled from the present and the past. Certainly, to say that expectation is related to the present and past, does not mean that it is “caused” by the present or past. Rather, we would say that it is “motivated.” To say that it is motivated means that the past and the present discharge a futural event or flow of events because of the alignment of sense the expected event has to the former, not because it has an objective connection to them on the order of rational correlations or natural occurrences.

Expectation is different from protention, however, insofar as expectation is an active comportment to the future. Expectation and hope, then, have this much in common: They both exhibit an orientation toward the future, and they are both carried out within the sphere of activity, not passivity.⁴ For example, having observed the recent air currents, weather patterns and cloud formations, I both expect it to be a mild and sunny day and I hope that it will be a mild and sunny day. Here, expectation and hope overlap in terms of object-orientation. However, even

⁴On the distinction between passive and active, see Edmund Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic*, trans., Anthony J. Steinbock (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001).

though and despite the fact that I expect a mild, sunny winter day, I can hope for a violent snowstorm (I want to take out my cross-country skis).

This example gives us a clear indication that expectation and hope are distinctive. The question we have to answer, however, concerns whether hope is somehow a modification of expectation or whether it is a unique and irreducible orientation toward the future. To do this, let me describe the belief structure inherent in expectation.

Intrinsic to the act of expectation is the fact that it posits the existence of something futurally. Expectation is carried out in the mode of belief as unbroken, straightforward relation to the future. When I see the Fed-Ex person drive up to the house, I expect him to drop off a package, and when I expect him and the package, I implicitly posit the existence of the Fed-Ex person, the package, etc; I live in the mode of natural acceptance. This is another way of saying that when I expect something, I expect it as actual, not as possible. When I see the truck pull away and turn on its turn signal, I posit its actual turning right, not its possible turning right. Of course, we may expect that something might possibly occur; I may panic in an instant that it may go straight into oncoming traffic—which would rupture my expectation, or maybe instigate a new one—but in the expectation itself, but in this instance the so-called possibility is lived as actually going to occur in the mode of belief. *Expectation is not a modalization of belief*; it is another kind of belief, a straightforward one oriented in the direction of future actuality as a mode of time-consciousness. In expectation, we “count on” the futural event as it is foreshadowed or anticipated.

Further, although expectation does not exist in a relationship of causality to the present and past, it is not completely liberated from the past or present, either. There are features of the past and the present that “demand” or “speak in favor of” something occurring. When the “demand” on the part of things is “accepted” in a straightforward, unquestioning manner, the future is posited as actual (i.e., as actually coming). When such a “demand” or “speaking in favor of” is mitigated by countervailing tendencies expectation can become modalized. In this case, something is posited as probable or likely to occur. Likelihood and probability are “impersonal” modifications of the act-structure that is carried out in expectation.

To sum up, expectation is a temporal belief-act that is oriented toward the future as a mode of time-consciousness, and arises as motivated on the basis of the present and past. Further, the actuality posited in straightforward expectation can be modalized, e.g., in terms of probability or likelihood. Having understood expectation in this way, it is easier to see the distinctiveness and irreducibility of the hope-act.

II. Hope as Engaged

Expectation remains functional as the hope is carried out, even when the hope runs contrary to the expectation; likelihood is a direct modalization of expectation. But hope is not on a continuum with likelihood, say, just “quantitatively” less.⁵ When I hope it will rain, I do not necessarily believe it “will” or “may” rain. Hope is different in kind, liberated from actuality and probability because hope is a unique modalization of belief carried out in the mode of possibility. I am not suggesting that possibility only arises with hope, but that when I hope, a unique possibility structure is in play.

Let me state here at the outset that I hesitate in using the term “possibility” to characterize the hope experience because it might fail precisely in evoking the movement of hope. “Possibility,” for example, can suggest that I somehow have a predetermined object “out there” ready made (“a possibility”), for which I then choose to hope. This, however, might be a more appropriate way of speaking where imagination is concerned. When I imagine, I can posit a realm of possibilities and then entertain one of them. But in hoping, I do not “hope” a possibility. Instead, as I will note below, we rely on an other-than-myself that makes something possible, internally, so to speak, but I do not posit something as a possibility in hope.

Furthermore, the discussion of possibility in this context could imply that I first encounter dire circumstances and then I hope (for a different possibility) as a way of escaping them. Nothing of the sort goes on like this in the hope experience. Hope is initiated as a way of taking up a situation and living through its meaning “spontaneously,” such that there is nothing thinglike to it. This is not to say that there is no motivation for hope, which as we will see is the ground for hope itself, but only that hope is not a rationalizing activity. Hope, we must insist, is evoked in the situation itself and emerges as part of its texture. It is not an ornament dressing up the situation or an afterthought posited in the face of trouble as an addendum. It is only after the fact that one can then attempt to analyze its structure, e.g., in terms of possibility. Given these limitations of the expression “possibility,” I nevertheless find it useful, at least for the time being, because it gives us a critical device—by no means the only one—of distinguishing hope from other acts like imagination, wishing, and longing, and thereby assists us in honing in on the distinctive structure of the hope-act.

With this caveat, let me continue by noting that hope lives through something implicitly as possible. It goes without saying that “possibility” covers a

⁵There are of course other modalizations: doubt, negation, reaffirmation, etc.

wide range of experiences. It is therefore necessary to specify the kind of possibility that is in question in hope. In order to discern the possibility structure of hope, let me begin by contrasting it with the possibility structure peculiar to imagination. When I imagine, say, a boat sailing in my front yard, my imagining operates in the sphere of *pure, open possibility*. Anything is possible. Here we would have a kind of arbitrary possibility since it is “motivated,” in the sense described above, neither by the past nor by the present, though it may borrow from the past and the present. It is completely free; I am in no way committed personally to what I imagine; there is no subjective investment, even though it is “I” who do the imagining. Imagining is an act that is quasi-tied to reality: I do not posit the boat in my yard as real, but I do posit it in the mode of “as if” it were real.

We can hone in on the structure of possibility peculiar to hope if we take yet another example, this time by distinguishing it from wishing. Wishing operates in the sphere of a counter-factual, open possibility. As such, the latter has significance not only for the future, but for the past as well. Let us take an example of cycling over broken glass. The moment I roll over the glass, I can at the same time wish that I had not been biking, I can wish that I had taken another route, I can wish that I had not hit the glass, or I can wish that I will not get a flat. Like imagining, wishing can relate both to the past and the future; and although there seems to be a more direct tie to a subjective investment in the wishing, when compared to imagining, I still do not need to have a personal involvement for the wish to be a wish; I do not have to attend to it with any personal commitment; it can be frivolous or casual and still be a wish.

In distinction to both imagining and wishing, hope has a unique structure as an *engaged possibility*. For example, when I live through the experience of hoping—where the object could range anywhere from escaping from prison to a completing a hike, from being with someone I love to finding a piece of dark chocolate—I am invested or committed in the outcome of the situation. Of course, I can both wish and hope for the same things, such as peace on earth, a solar eclipse, or being a horse. Important to note is that it is neither the object that qualifies the experience of hope, nor the so-called “objective” reality and how it might be perceived by others. Peculiar to the experience of hope is my subjective disposition toward the outcome as an engaged possibility, whereas in wishing, I can live in the wishing without an actual engagement in the outcome. Hence, when I am about to undergo surgery, I do more than wish all goes well (which I could do, of course), but I hope all goes well. Accordingly, I am implicitly more at a remove, as it were, when I wish than when I hope.

Of course, there are other experiences that have an engagement, similar to the act of hope, yet are distinct from the hope-act, namely, “longing.” When, for example, I long to see a friend who is in prison, it is more than a wish to see him; my orientation is an engaged one, maybe even emotionally charged. But this engagement lacks another essential element that distinguishes hope both from wishing and from longing: sustainability, which presupposes a basis of hope. Thus, I may long to see my friend literally without any hope of him ever being released.

In order to articulate this sustainability peculiar to hope’s structure, let me first describe the hope-act as essentially related to an other-than-myself. I reserve the treatment of hope as sustainable until after I treat the following dimension of hope (see section 4 below).

III. The Hope-act is Essentially Other-Related

Hoping is a way of taking up a situation not only by being personally engaged, but by experiencing myself as not being sufficient to the situation or as not in control of the situation I live through. If we inquire even further into the structure of hope, we observe that hope is an act that is directed toward an “outside” or to an “other-than-myself.” This is a structure that is essential to all acts of hope, and constitutes one of the core features of this experience. Negatively put, this feature is suggested by the fact that when I hope, the hoped-for outcome is *given as not in my control to bring it about*.

Even the most ordinary of cases of hope harbor something very unordinary, namely, an orientation to an “other-than-myself,” and it is this sense, even if implicit, that I want to trace back to its ultimate foundation. For example, if I am gambling, repairing a computer, or in a relationship, and if I *hope* (e.g., to win, to fix it, or to be with someone), I am implicitly directed to an other-than-myself where the hope is concerned. Alternately, if I experience myself as in control of a situation or as completely confident to bring something about, I will not hope; there is no motivation for it. Therefore, no matter what the objective circumstances are, my hope implies that I am not ultimately in control of the situation, which is to say, I rely on something else that is able to govern the situation. Accordingly, not only is the current hopeful situation not in my control, in hope I find myself in relation to an outside of myself, which also is not in my control.

It may be objected, however, that there are certain cases of hope where I am not oriented to any “outside” of myself; I not only trust in my own abilities, but I hope precisely in my own abilities such that the hoped for event is in my control. I

could hope, for example, that I do well in an interview, or even, that I had done well on my exam. By “in my control,” I understand, in its narrowest scope, my capacity, as who I am now, to bring about something in the living-present, however broadly this be taken. If I say, for instance, “I hope to finish this book soon,” I do not mean that I cannot read, but that it is not in my power to bring it about now; perhaps I am lacking in energy and time, and it is “beyond me” to do it. Similarly, when I hope to do well in an interview or to have done well on an exam, I am appealing implicitly to something that will make it so, “something” in my future or “something” animating my past actions that will make it so. When I hope in this way, I implicitly presuppose that I, myself, have no power to produce this situation now or any power to change what is already done, but I hope that something “in” what has happened will make it so.

These are perhaps trivial examples. I mention them because even in these everyday examples, we see that to experience a “not in my control” in hope points to a “beyond myself,” to an “other-than-myself” to bring about something whereby I experience, however implicitly, a dependency upon this something other beyond myself. Hence, hope is an act that expresses an experience of some power greater than my own as a power upon which I am dependent for occasioning the hoped-for event; it evokes a relation of reliance and dependence.

So far I have considered hope primarily in terms of object relations. But these experiences point back more profoundly to the experience of myself and my finitude. For this reason, when I experience hope, in any dimension of my life, it does not only indicate a power other or greater than me or an “outside” to myself; it does not just evoke a relationship of dependence and reliance; it reveals most profoundly that I am not self-grounding. If I were self-grounding, I would be sufficient unto myself, I would be my own ground for the hope-act, which is to say, there would be no emergence of hope as a distinctive experience. The other-than-myself upon which I rely in hope is the other that “grounds” me in hope, and not just particular events that are hoped-for. The experience of hope, then, reveals the experience of an “other” who gives me to myself, and hence as not self-grounding, in terms I will suggest below, as *sustainable*, without cause or arbitrariness. That which gives me to myself is that which sustains me in my openness and my becoming as witnessed in the hope-act.

The experience of dependence and reliance on a power of some kind other than or outside of myself, and the experience of not being self-grounding that is given in the hope-act, points to a dimension of experiencing that I would call most radically “religious.” Even though hope does not have its only significance in the

religious dimension of experience, hope only takes on its full significance at the religious level.

By religious experiencing, I do not mean practices or rituals undertaken within a religion or cultural heritage, or a making a petition to God. To cite Otto, religious experience is the experience of being before “an overpowering, absolute might of some kind,” the experience of the presence of that “Something,” that “whom or what,” which Otto calls the “numinous.”⁶ Here, however, the numinous is not necessarily qualified as Personal, since in any religious experience, it may still remain undetermined. Accordingly, when I hope, I may have no specific “other” in mind. In my view, however, this other-relatedness peculiar to the religious dimension of experiencing would have to be understood most profoundly as inter-Personal. Elaborating upon the latter observation would take us beyond the confines of this paper, and would demand an appeal to the experiences of various mystics to show this fundamental dimension.

Here I want to restrict myself to five observations. First, there is a general characteristic in hoping of the essential relation to a “beyond” myself that is revealed in and through the experience of hope. It suggests that the interpersonal dimension is essential to hope, and that hope cannot be reduced to the mastery of the ego.⁷ Second, the experience of not being in control and of finding myself before an other-than-myself in a relation of dependence (however implicitly) means that the attitude coeval with hope is humility, not pride; “I” cannot be the ultimate motivation for hope. This would be one reason why hope could not be reducible, e.g., to desire. Desiring, like wishing and longing, are acts rooted in the “I” or the “subject.” Desire has no ground, or strictly speaking, I am the ground of desire; and when I desire, I am oriented toward a specific object as subject to myself. In desire, I am left to myself, as it were, and if I were left to myself, I would only wish-for, long-for, or desire. But by virtue of the ground of hope, which is given in and through hoping (or loving—but this is a topic for another paper), I am not left to myself. In this way, hoping does not evolve from desire, but it can signal the eclipse of desire. In desire, the “other” is the object of my desire. In hope, the other-than-myself is sustainer of the hope act in its initiated orientation.⁸

⁶Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans., John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 10 (my emphasis); see 11-23.

⁷There is thus not only an inter-Personal dependence, but an inter-personal one as well in the experience of hope.

⁸Not being left to myself means that I am not self-grounding. I am given to myself as sustainable, or alternately, that I am sustained by this ground. On the one hand, being sustainable in the matter of who I become means that I am not determined in advance. If it were given as determined, neither hope nor fatalism could emerge as possible experiences (a point I will come back to below—since hopelessness presupposes hope). On the other hand, being a *sustainable* in the matter of who I can

Third, due to this ground of hope, the temporality of hope takes on new significance. In hope, I have a futural orientation. But when I hope, I do not “expect” something, as we have noted above. In hope, the futural orientation is qualified uniquely as an “awaiting” (as Marcel might say⁹), because the ground of hope encourages patience. I can “await” in hope, since I am not left to myself.¹⁰

Fourth, the hope experience is rooted ultimately in a religious experiencing, and this is why hope can and must point to an other-than-myself in all instances of hope, no matter what that hope pertains to or no matter how vague this “beyond” myself might be experienced in otherwise everyday acts of hope. Certainly, hope takes place in acts that are not explicitly religious. Hoping that my cell phone works after I drop it is not directly a religious act. When I take it to the repair shop, and hope the agent can fix it, I am relying upon the ability of another person to fulfill my hope. I do not have to pray to God, for example, for this to be the case. My point, however, is that these experiences are grounded in a dimension of experiencing instituted through a primordial experiencing of an outside force in terms of reliance and dependency. Without any explicit religious appeal, a hope, one as seemingly innocuous as hoping my cell phone works, is only possible on the basis of such experiencing. Accordingly, when I hope for something, my hoping is oriented precisely as a specification or delimitation trained on this or that. This is why hoping my cell phone works is not explicitly a religious act. Nevertheless, since hoping is most fully religious in character, my hoping with respect to the cell phone is simultaneously a de-limitation, that is, an opening; it opens me, implicitly, precisely to this foundational religious dimension.

Finally, because it is in the religious dimension of experience that hope receives its fullest significance, wherein modes of givenness such as epiphany and

become means developing “my way” is sustainable on the basis of hope. If my emergence were arbitrary (say, in the case of vitalism), there would be no sustainability for “my way,” no experience of a “vocation,” and no “ground” for the hope of the sustainability of my way, and no basis for experience of hope to emerge.

⁹Marcel, “Desire and Hope,” cf. 280-81.

¹⁰Lest we think that hope is always positive, even within the religious sphere of experience, let us examine an example from St. Teresa of Avila. She writes: “Look at the good remedy the devil gave me and the charming humility—the great disquiet within me. But how could I quiet my soul? It was losing its calm; it remembered favors and gifts; it saw that this world’s pleasures are disgusting. How it was able to go on amazes me. I did so by means of hope because I never thought (insofar as I now recall, for this must have happened twenty-one years ago) I would cease being determined to return to prayer—but I was waiting to be very purified of sin. Oh, how wrong was the direction in which I was going with this hope! The devil would have kept me hoping until judgment day and then have led me into hell.” See St. Teresa of Avila, *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila* Volume One, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh O.C. D. and Otilio Rodriguez O. C. D. (Washington D.C.: ICS Publications, 1976), Ch. 19/11. In this case, hoping was a distraction and a false humility since according to her the devil had insidiously become the sustainer of hope.

revelation are operative (and not the presentation of objects), the very structure of intention-fulfillment has to be called into question where hope is concerned. Not only does the ground of hope not fit the category of object-givenness, but we would have the experience of more being given than what I hoped-for, and hence an “overflowing” beyond the intention of hope. Accordingly, we would have to distinguish between the intention of hope, which is oriented toward something, and hopefulness. Hopefulness is already an orientation to the ground of hope, without any particular object intended in the hope act. In fact, that comportment of hopefulness, which is grounded in the ground of hope, imbues and animates all I do, even when I explicitly carry out an act of hope. For this reason, hopefulness would have to be understood as foundational for the hope-act, and as oriented toward the ground of hope as no-thing in particular, could be understood most profoundly as “revelatory” of mystery.

Hoping therefore entails a basis for hope, which is a reliance on an other force for living the situation beyond its otherwise closed strictures. But this ground of hope is only given in and through the hope act itself. I do not first think “I cannot bring something about by myself; therefore, I will hope.” It is not as if the ground of hope were somehow given first, and then I hope, or when I hope, the hope act somehow causes the ground of hope. When I hope, “I” do not “appeal” to the ground of hope; but in and through hoping, an appeal is made, or can be understood as having been made. It is not my hoping that is efficacious, but the other-than-myself which is the motivation in hoping. Ultimately, it is my spontaneous hoping that is the experience of relying on another force of some kind. Without this implicit or explicit basis, hope could not arise.

IV. Hope as Sustainable

Hope is the experience of an engagement. In addition, due to the other-oriented dimension of hope, which reveals a ground of hope, possibility is also *sustainable*. For this reason, hope cannot be “merely” subjective. Without this basis or ground of hope, which enables the orientation in hope to be sustainable, one would be unable to distinguish, e.g., a hope from a mere wish or hope from merely longing. Longing and wishing are differentiated by the former demanding an engagement and the latter permitting a frivolity. But both are differentiated from hope insofar as hope is, essentially, sustainable. Thus, in wishing, longing, like in hoping, there is nothing we can do; but in hope, something can be done, as it were, and this goes to the ground of hope.

When I hope, for example, that I find a piece of dark chocolate, or when I hope to become a horse, all objective criteria are held in check by the ground of hope, whatever that may be. I take the hoped-for event as sustainable. Somehow it can happen, despite what I expect, despite its probability, despite what others think, despite how it may look “objectively.” Note also that the motivation with respect to hope is essentially different from that of expectation. A motivation is given for expectation “internally,” as it were, from the past and present. In hope, a “beyond” motivates and sustains the hope (precisely as the ground of hope, be it the horse-people, the Holy, etc.).

Let us examine the other side of what it means for hope to be lived as sustainable. When I am engaged in the hoped-for outcome as sustainable, I simultaneously have before me the contingency of that same outcome as not occurring. Although the ground of hope is the founding moment in the sense that it makes hope sustainable, to be sustainable also entails a contingency. Otherwise, the act of hope would be immaterial. Let me give an example. I am seated in a café, waiting for a friend to arrive. We had made plans to meet for a performance, my friend is reliable, and I expect him to arrive any time now. As the hour approaches, I begin to get nervous, and I hope that he arrives soon. Here, I experience that he may not arrive on time. Expectation is still functional, and in all probability he will arrive on time, but now an act of hope is carried out that intervenes in the situation and qualifies it uniquely. If the contingency were not given along with the positive sustainability, hope would not arise as an experience.

Notice that the other-than- or outside-of-myself I mentioned above cannot be experienced as a pre-determining, necessitating force, be it either from laws of nature or a deity. In fact, it is in the face of such necessitating determinacy that I hope (and this means that in hope such a force has to be experienced as something other necessitating). On the other hand, by noting that a hoped-for event is experienced as contingent, I am not suggesting that the event is experienced as impossible—that is, where it is given as ruled out in advance.

Certainly, something may be understood objectively to be impossible, or be experienced as impossible by someone else. But I cannot at the same time hope and experience what is hoped-for as impossible. For example, I might hope to survive an F5 tornado while standing in its path, even though for everyone else it would just be “suicide.” For me, it is—by some means, and motivated by the ground of hope—experienced as possible to survive it even though I am aware that I probably will not survive it. There is at least a hairsbreadth of sustainability given in hope. If I *experience it as impossible*, I will not hope.

Thus, hope does not have the same rapport with impossibility as it does with some of the other features I have described, like expectation, probability, and improbability. But whereas hope may be at odds with expectation or probability while I live through both (possibly) contesting experiences, hope *transforms* the experience of impossibility such that the two cannot be lived through simultaneously. For example, I am on the coast when an earthquake hits offshore; an enormous tidal wave towers above me on the beach and I take any attempt to flee as futile; it is impossible to outrun the tsunami, and I give up. Now, if I were to experience hope in such an instance, which is entirely possible, I could not simultaneously experience my escape as impossible. Hope lives the situation in such a way that the “limits” are no longer definitive, and their rupture is sustainable. Hope does not merely mollify the experience of the impossible; it commutes the experience of it to a sustainability.

In brief, hope operates in the sphere of engagement and sustainability; it takes place in excess of or in the face of expectation, probability, improbability, and impossibility, but in the latter case, it transforms the experience of the impossible and makes it precisely, hopeful.

V. Hope and Denial

With the commutation of the experience of impossibility through the experience of hope, questions concerning denial naturally surface. When I hope, am I not just really living in denial, in denial, that is, of an impossible situation? For the sake of simplicity, let us define denial as not accepting the “facts” as they are presented, so that when I am confronted with a situation, I posit a different reality. Objectively speaking, the reality I deny may or may not be true. At issue is the fact that when I live in denial, I do not accept the reality as presented, and I do this by positing a different one. Further, in denial, I do not explicitly experience my positing of a new reality *as* a denial. Rather, I take my position as “just the way things are.” It is only to another that I am “in denial” or it is adduced as such by the outside. Finally, denial is not future oriented, but present oriented. In denial, I assert that the present situation is such and such; there is no different outcome to be awaited, and no change of a situation. I posit the state of affairs as such, now; this is the way it is and nothing anyone can say or do will change that.

In hope, however, I do not deny the present facts, for in some sense, they are already accepted. Yet, in this tacit acceptance, hope is directed toward the future and a possible transformation of the current situation. What is held in check, as I

intimated above, is the expected, the likely or unlikely, or the impossible outcome of the situation. Further, in hope, I do not posit the futural outcome as real, for if it were real, I would be precisely in the experience of the fulfillment of hope, which, when fulfilled, would be the cessation of hope. But where hope is operative, it is functional “despite” or in the face of an outcome that might run counter to the hoped for event.

Let us take the example of a person missing in action (MIA), and let us begin with the case of denial. After a time, let’s say, a loved one hears word from military officials that his brother has been killed in a war. Denial would imply a negation of this situation and the positing of another one. “I don’t believe it” (i.e., I *believe* something else); “he is still alive”; “he will come back home soon.” One could live in this belief posture for an indeterminate time. Certainly, the person who is living in actual denial of this official promulgation may actually be right; perhaps it is a case of mistaken identity; the brother is still alive and will come back. The point is that in denial a situation is negated and a different reality is accepted such that when I deny a particular “reality” there is no room for hope, since I have already asserted another reality.

Now, if we examine this example in light of hope, we see immediately how hope is distinctive from denial. In hope, there is not a direct denial of the situation; but I do not accept the finality of it, either. Against expectation as an unbroken, straightforward relation, against probability or impossibility, *I hope*, which takes up the situation as an engaged, sustainable one with at least an implicit ground for that hope. “Yes, I understand what you tell me, but still I hope he is alive.” I do not imagine that he is alive; I do not expect that he is alive. I hope, against all odds, that he is alive. Someone may think that I am just desperate; my family and friends may think that I am “in denial.” But when I *live* through the experience of hope I do not negate a current reality by positing a different reality, I implicitly acknowledge both the negative and positive possibilities, and live the hoped-for event as sustainable. The positing of a new present reality on either side of the report (acceptance or denial), would not be the experience of hope; it might be the disappointment or fulfillment of hope as accepting a new reality, but it would not be or would no longer be hope.

VI. Hope and Hopelessness

So far, I have treated the cases in which hope is operative. But what about the instances in which hope is not operative? I can think here of at least four

instances where this might be the case, some of which have already been alluded to above: (a) it simply does not arise, (b) it is fulfilled, (c) it is disappointed, (d) hope is abandoned, giving rise to the experience of hopelessness.

a. In the first case, hope does not arise at all; things are simply expected to run their course in a certain way. For instance, I am certain that the sun will rise tomorrow morning; here hope never becomes an issue for me because my certainty is so strong. Such a certainty can extend to all aspects of our lives. It could, e.g., go in the direction of a kind of religious rigidity; I could assert with a kind of absolute, unquestioning conviction that God will handle everything, cure every ill, etc. Here God would not be the ground of hope, but the controller of world-destiny. Since everything would somehow be determined for me, and I would experience it *as* determined (not only is the opposite impossible, any other possibility is in effect impossible), the experience of hope would not be able to arise; it would in fact be eclipsed by my very fixation.

b. A hope may not be operative in the sense that it is no longer functional, that is, the instant it becomes fulfilled. I mentioned at the outset that a hope-act is fulfilled when the hoped-for event arrives in the manner in which the hoped-for act was directed. Fulfillment may be instantaneous, or the fulfillment may have a temporal duration. In either case, when a hope is realized, the hope will cease because it will have been fulfilled in the manner appropriate to the hope. In Dante's "Paradise," for example, there is no hope (no longer hope) because hope is fulfilled.

c. Hope may not be functional in the sense that it is not realized and hence its directedness disappointed. Whereas in perception, the non-fulfillment of an expectation takes place through the presentation of something new that stands in its stead (i.e., a new perceptual object), the disappointment or non-realization of hope is not supplanted by a new hope. For example, I hope at the beginning of the basketball season that a particular sports team will win the series title. The season is over, a different event arises (i.e., someone else wins), and my hope is not fulfilled. In this instance, the hope ends, but it is not because a new hope has arisen in its place. I can of course still hope, even if the hope is not fulfilled; but then it has the quality of "not yet" fulfilled. I still have hope.

d. Finally, the situation in which hope is disappointed is structurally different from hopelessness or abandoning hope. In the first three instances, hope is simply not or no longer functional. But in the case of hopelessness, one is simultaneously aware (i.e., experiences the fact) that one's hope will never be fulfilled—with hope persisting as a background to hopelessness. One can think here of Dante's "Inferno" where there is a persistent awareness of hope *in abstracto*, but that it is not for me. Hence, those who enter Hell are instructed: *Lasciate ogni*

speranze, vio ch'entrate (Abandon every hope, ye that enter).¹¹ Because hopelessness is given only on the ground of hope, whereas hope can be experienced without hopelessness, hope has to be understood as the fundamental feature and as foundational for the experience of hopelessness. Since hopelessness is premised on the possibility of hope, we become despondent or we despair in hopelessness. Without the fundamental experience of hope there could never be an experience of hopelessness.

It is precisely in the case of hopelessness that impossibility is experienced as impossibility. To be sure, I can experience the impossibility of a situation without it leading to hopelessness. For example, I may realize that it is impossible for me to meet a friend for lunch without this realization issuing in hopelessness or despair. But when I experience the impossibility as such in hopelessness, I experience that (1) my hope (2) will never be fulfilled—with hope persisting as a background and foundation for hopelessness. I have no hope, I despair. I may now *wish* things *were* different, but I cannot hope. This can be the case in a variety of situations: for the terminally ill, for prisoners doing a life sentence or who are condemned to death, for someone who does not see the possibility of forgiveness, etc.

It is true that on the face of things, there may be nothing “to speak in favor of” a certain outcome. But for me, who hopes, I *cannot* at the same time experience this “not speaking in favor of” *as* the impossibility of the hoped-for event. I could say “it looks impossible,” or “it seems impossible,” but when I hope, I still maintain the sustainability in the face of what is otherwise impossible. Likewise, when I “hope against hope,” there is something for me that sustains hope even when all occasions for hope seem to have been exhausted. I do not actually experience the impossibility of the situation (accordingly, “impossibility” gets retroactively qualified as “seeming” or “appearing”). So, the protagonist in Bresson’s *A Man Escaped* is indeed faced with a situation that appears hopeless, and by all calculations of most all the other prisoners, it is. But if the protagonist were to experience it only as impossible, he would not try to escape; he would give up; the situation would be hopeless; suicide then becomes a real alternative.

These descriptions of the hope-experience have yielded basic structures of hope, and have also enabled us to glimpse its distinctiveness from other acts that share similar characteristics or that might be associated with hope. Hope, for example, has an irreducible futural sense, but is not a mode of time-consciousness. It is an act that is essentially related to what is beyond myself. Similar to other acts

¹¹*Inferno*, Gate of Hell, Canto III.

of the emotional life, like loving, it is essentially “other-related,” where this “other”—however it is given—becomes the ground or basis of hope. Further, hope introduces a dimension of possibility, precisely as a sustainable and engaged possibility. As such, it is essentially distinct from experiences like imagining, wishing, longing, or negatively, denial. Finally, it is only on the basis of hope that the experience of hopelessness emerges as the experience of impossibility as impossibility.

There are admittedly many other dimensions of the hope-experience that would have to be considered: a more detailed account of fulfillment and disappointment peculiar to hope, the relation between hope and hopefulness, the relation between faith and hope, desire and hope, promise and hope, optimism and hope, etc. But this delimitation of the hope-act at least provides us with a few fundamental features of this unique experience that can be qualified and elaborated upon in future work.