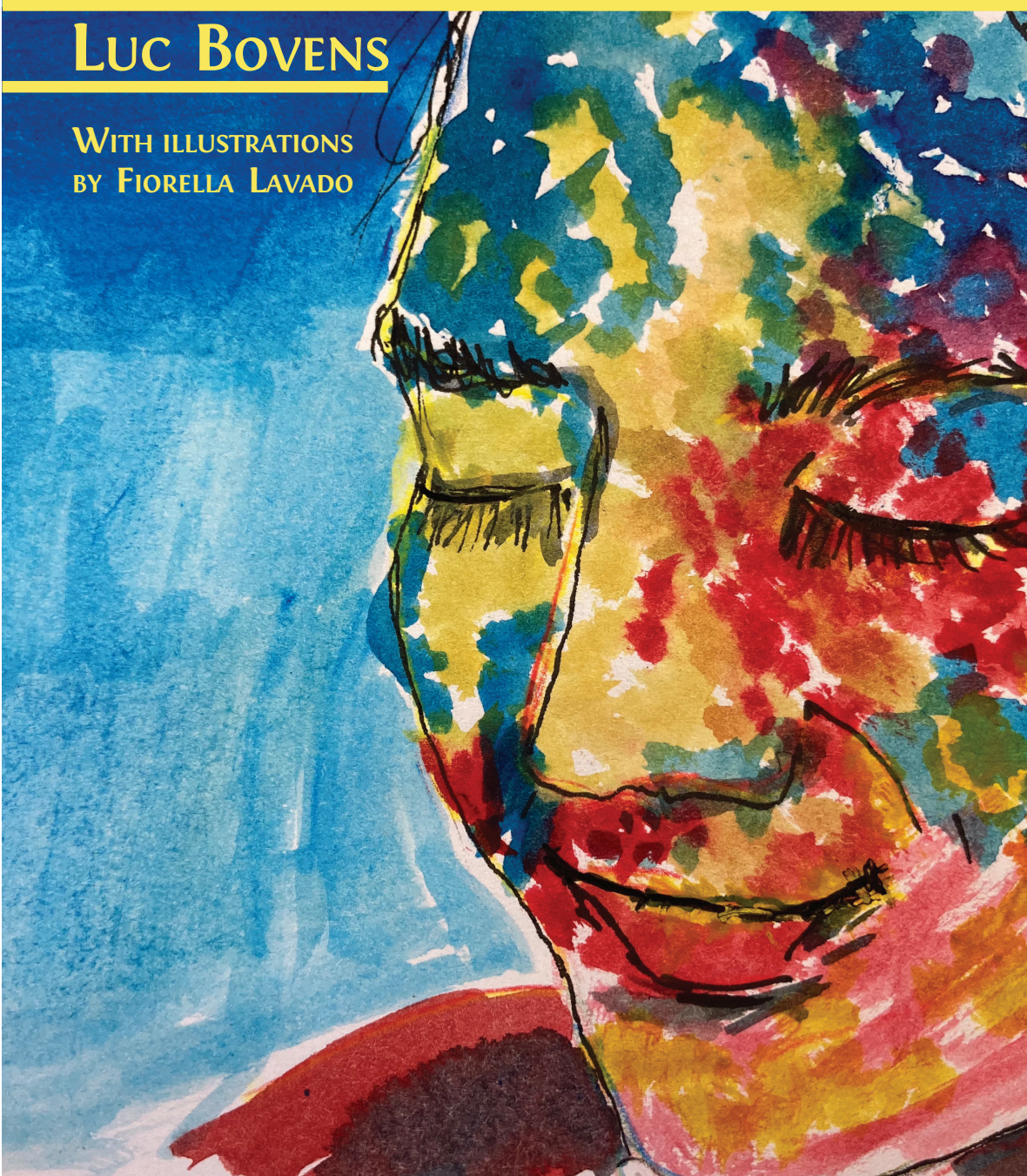
COPING

A PHILOSOPHICAL GUIDE

LUC BOVENS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY FIORELLA LAVADO



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1. Hope

What Is Hope?

Leonardo Da Vinci had the habit of buying captive birds just to set them free. In the *Codex Atlanticus,* there are multiple drawings of a caged bird with an inscription in Da Vinci's trademark mirror writing: '*I pensieri si voltano alla speranza*' [The thoughts turn toward hope.] For Da Vinci, setting a bird free was a symbol of hope.

So let our thoughts turn toward hope. We start with the nature of hope: What is it to hope for something? Here is my proposal. Hoping for something is *wanting it to be so*, *believing that it might or might not be so*, and *engaging in mental imagery* about what it would be like if it were so. You need all three—that is, the desire, the belief, and the mental imagery—to be hoping, and if you have all three in place, then you are indeed hoping. Let us look at each in turn.

We hope for what we desire. We can't hope for something and at the same time have no desire for it. Sometimes hopes don't follow what, all in all, we want. Part of me wants to have an ice cream, and part of me doesn't. In as much as the ice cream is yummy, I want it, and in as much as it has a gazillion calories, I want to stay away from it. Now, all in all, I want to hold off. But I must admit, I do secretly hope that the ice cream van will come by and that I will succumb to temptation.

Hopes may even be divided and follow conflicting desires. I want my child to get an MBA and continue the family business. But I also want them to be happy, and I know that their true aspiration is to become an artist. We can hope to eat our cake and, at the same time, hope to continue having it. We can't have it both ways, but there is no harm in cherishing conflicting hopes. Such hopes only become problematic

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when they compel us to act in inconsistent ways. However, so long as our actions are in line with what, all in all, we want, there is nothing untoward about conflicting hopes.

We hope for what we believe might or might not be so. I can hope for what I think is likely—for example, that I will make it home safely tonight—as well as for what I think is unlikely—for example, that I will win the lottery this week. But there is no hope in the face of certainty. If I am certain that my friend will come for a visit, I can look forward to it, but I can't hope for it. If I am certain that my friend will not come, then I can regret it, but I can't hope for it.

Hope need not be about the future. If a fellow soldier was killed behind enemy lines, I may hope that they were not tortured. So long as I believe that they might or might not have been tortured, my hopes can be engaged. If I'm uncertain about the past, I can just as much hope for some past event as for some future event.

When we hope for something, we entertain mental imagery about what it would be like. You are a Lana Del Rey fan, and you have never seen her perform live. You would like it if she were to come to a venue near you and you would certainly go. You haven't checked her touring schedule but considering that you live in a reasonably sized town, it may happen. However, the whole thing hardly crosses your mind. Are you hoping that she will come? I don't think so. It's not enough to want her to come and to believe that it might happen. In addition, you need to devote some mental energy to it. You have to spend some time cherishing the idea of what it would be like if it were to happen. What songs would she sing? With whom would you go to the concert? What would the stage look like? What would the audience be like? For short, I'll call it '*mental imaging*'—the mental act of letting the prospect roll (or bounce, depending on one's personality) around in one's head.

There are other terms that capture this third component of hope, but they all fall somewhat short. 'Fancying' is too close to desiring. 'Fantasizing' has too much of a ring of the unreal. 'Daydreaming' comes close, but it is too spacey. 'Envisioning what something would be like' is a bit too intellectual. But if you like these terms better, that's fine with me.

The mental imaging of hope has a vague association with Aristotle. There are greetings cards and even tattoos with the saying '"Hope is a waking dream." Aristotle' But admittedly, the reference to Aristotle is only second-hand and goes back to Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, written over five centuries after Aristotle's death. In his biography of Aristotle, he writes: '[Aristotle] was asked to define hope, and he replied, "It is a waking dream."'

It is easiest to motivate mental imaging when it comes to hoping for wonderful things. But we also hope that bad things won't come to pass. A soldier captured behind enemy line hopes that they will not be tortured. A parent hopes that there is no blow-up between siblings at a family reunion. What kind of mental imaging is there in such cases? Think of something that you fear and how you might dream that all will go well. In your dreams you lay out a path on which the dreaded event does not happen. Someone who hopes that all will go well does something akin to this while being awake. What goes around in their head are ways that the story might unfold smoothly without their fears coming to pass.

The Thing with Feathers

'Hope is the thing with feathers/ That perches in the soul,' writes Emily Dickinson. But what is so good about hope? Might one not equally say that if good things are to come our way, let them come as they may, and let's enjoy them then and there. What additional benefit is gained from hoping for those good things to come, a skeptic might ask.

Many of the benefits of hoping hinge on mental imaging. Mental imagery provides *respite* in trying times, adds to our *resolve*, uncovers new *pathways*, and makes room for *reflection*. Below, I will also show how hoping provides the courage to take on responsible risks and how it fosters inner strength.

Respite. There is a simple answer to why hoping is a good thing a few lines down in Dickinson's poem. She likens hope to a bird that keeps us warm and is not fazed by the gale winds of the storm around us. When we close the doors to the outside world, we can enjoy the pleasures of how sweet it would be to have what we want. Mental imagery is shelter

from the storm. There is joy in indulging our senses in the theatre of the mind. It may not be the real thing—it is 'the tune without the words,' says Dickinson—but even without the words, the tune offers the strength to carry on.

When Pooh Bear is asked what he likes best in this world, he is stumped for an answer: 'Because although Eating Honey was a very good thing to do,' A. A. Milne writes in *The House at Pooh Corner*, 'there was a moment just before you began to eat it which was better than when you were, but he didn't know what it was called.' And though Pooh Bear (a bear of very little brain) lacks in vocabulary, he does not lack in wisdom. Indeed, the pleasures of anticipation may exceed the pleasures of experience.

Hoping differs from anticipation, though. We anticipate when we are confident that good things are to come, whereas in hoping we 'dwell in Possibility'—another Dickinson line. But the pleasure of hoping is somewhat like the pleasure of anticipation in that both involve mental imaging. The only difference is this: In anticipation, we imagine how wonderful things will be *when* we get what we want. In hoping, we imagine how wonderful things would be *if* we were to get what we want. And while enjoying this moment of respite, batteries recharge for the challenges ahead.

Resolve. Mental imaging of what is hoped for is keeping one's eyes on the prize. It is this focus that provides resolve, the motivation to persist. Admittedly, there is not only the carrot—there is also the stick. The carrot is the prize of success, while the stick is the cost of failure. Hope's companion is fear, and fear involves mental imagery of the stick. Fear also has motivational force. Some people do better with carrots; some people do better with sticks.

Most of us need some balance between hope and fear. Too much hope can make us drunk—we may wallow in the thought of how wonderful it all will be and forget that there are some necessary hurdles to overcome. Too much fear can make us despair. Despair is paralyzing and prevents us from taking the required steps. But the proper balance of hope and fear, adapted to the case at hand and sensitive to what works for each of us, is what offers the best chances of success.

Pathways. Mental imaging tends to spill over into exploring the pathways that could get us to where we want to be. Where might there be a feasible route? And what are the steps to be taken? Hoping is an antidote to resigning oneself to the status quo, and it engages us to creatively explore better ways forward. This is the hope of the civil rights movement and, more recently, of the Obama campaign. It is the hope that, in the words of Martin Luther King, 'transforms [a] liability into an asset' ('Shattered Dreams').

Reflection. Mental imaging not only explores pathways toward the destination but also focuses on the destination itself. We cherish daydreaming about what it would be like if we were to have what we want. But wants are fluid. If I want ice cream and I realize that there is none, I may just shift to cherry pie. I wanted ice cream because I wanted something sweet, and cherry pie would do just as well. Mental imaging coaxes us to explore the space of possibilities. If what was initially hoped for is not accessible, then are there any substitutes that would do just as well considering my larger aims?

Here is an example with a bit more substance. A journalist may hope to receive a Pulitzer Prize because they take it to be a mark of recognition, and they may hope for recognition because they take it to be constitutive of a rewarding professional life. Now hoping can be illuminating in that it invites one to reflect on and rearrange one's values. Our journalist examines what it is they want in life and why it is that they want it. They may come to realize that a Pulitzer is not so necessary after all. There are other and better ways to gain recognition than by winning a Pulitzer. Or, more deeply, there are other and better ways to improve their professional life than by striving for recognition. They may become more service-oriented and intend for their journalistic contributions to make a difference. It is through mental imaging they come to see what they really want out of life, what is attainable, and what they are capable of. The mental imaging of hope stirs up reflection and recalibrates desires, leading to a richer life and greater want satisfaction.

Hoping is unlikely to bring all these benefits at the same time. If I hope for past events, then there is no need to strengthen resolve or figure out a pathway since there is nothing I can do about the past. Respite and

reflection may be absent from our hopes as well. It is not guaranteed that we will find respite in hope—there are shameful hopes that reveal the darker side of ourselves, as we will discuss later. Nor can we always count on shifting our values through reflection—wants may be both specific and rigid so that mulling over them has little effect.

Hope's 'feathers' are all contingent on circumstances. They are sufficiently prevalent that they are worth mentioning as *typical* benefits of hoping. And given that they are typical benefits, they are good reasons to try to foster hope in ourselves and the loved ones in our care. But they are not essential to hope. Hoping remains hoping, even if it comes without the benefits that it typically provides.

A Winning Strategy

In Matthew's 'Parable of the Talents' (Matt 25:14–30), a master gives five coins to one servant, two coins to the second, and one coin to the third. The first two servants invest and double their coins, whereas the third plays it safe and buries the one coin and returns it on the day of his master's return. The master praises the first two but scolds the third servant.

This is a curious parable since it seems to encourage risk-taking. One feels for the servant who dutifully returns the one coin. Should he not be rewarded for playing it safe? Was it not the prudent thing to do to avoid risk and to make sure that he could return the one coin?

There are good and bad gambles in life. A good gamble is a good deal— considering the chances and what there is to lose or win. We should embrace it. Sure, there is a chance of losing, but it is the hope for gain that provides the courage to take up a good gamble. I am not making any claims to Bible exegesis, but here is one way to read the parable: Investing the master's coins is like taking up a good gamble, whereas burying them is like turning it down. There is nothing imprudent about taking up such gambles. Though one may lose sometimes, in the long run a disposition of taking up good gambles pays off.

Real life is full of risks, and risks can take many forms. There is choosing a career, committing to a relationship, engaging in friendships, buying a house, saving for retirement. If you are reasonably confident that you can identify the good gambles, then you should embrace them,

one after another. You may lose a few, but you can be confident that, in the long run you will do much better than if you are too scared to play.

Why are people scared to embrace risk when they are facing a single good gamble? Because they take a short-term perspective. They succumb to myopia and become fixated on the possible losses of each gamble separately. This fixation has a high opportunity cost: It leaves us in a worse place than we would have been if we had persistently taken one good gamble after another.

Here is where hope comes in. It makes us focus on the possible gains in good gambles and helps overcome our myopic fixation on the possible losses. And hence one will adopt the winning strategy of accepting good gambles in the game of life at large.

The Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Samuelson relates an intriguing story (*Scientia,* 1963) that illustrates this idea. Samuelson is out with a few colleagues for dinner and proposes the following gamble with a fair coin. If heads, he commits to paying the gambler $200, whereas if tails, the gambler commits to paying him $100. One colleague, whom he calls 'a distinguished scholar,' says that he is willing to take up the gamble, but only if he can play the game one hundred times.

The motivation behind this response is clear. By accepting the single gamble, one has a fifty-fifty chance of losing money. By accepting a series of one hundred gambles, one has a negligible chance of losing money and a big chance of winning money, even a substantial amount of money, by the end of the evening. (To lose money, one would have to lose 67 times or more, and the chance of such a losing streak is less than 1 in 2000.)

We might think that gambling with colleagues might strain friendships. We might have a dislike of gambling. But let us abstract from all that and focus on the risks and the payoffs. I think that most of us would agree to playing a series of one hundred gambles, just as Samuelson's colleague did. But many of us would be hesitant to accept a single such gamble. Is it rational to accept the series, but not the single gamble?

If the colleague is acutely short of money, we can well understand why he would not want to agree to the single gamble. In this case, the gamble is a bad gamble. What can be won is $200, but what can be lost is not just $100, but, say, $100 and the humiliation of washing dishes all night.

If he is not acutely short of money, then it is a good gamble. There is a 50 percent chance of gaining $200 and a 50 percent chance of losing $100. So, on average, one might expect a net gain of $50, that is, 0.50 times $200 minus 0.50 times $100. Good gambles are gambles with positive expectations. We should embrace good gambles, even in the one-off case. And hoping that things will go well can help us do this.

If Samuelson's story did not convince you of this, here is another way to put it— without the numbers. Hope is what helps with smart risk-taking, and smart risk-takers tend to do well in life. An evolutionary biologist might put it as follows: Nature selects in favor of those who have hope written in their genes.

But then what about fear? What fear is good for is that it makes us focus on the possible losses. It helps us overcome a myopic fixation on the potential gains in bad gambles. A resolution to decline bad gambles is also a winning strategy in the game of life at large. You may win an occasional one, but in the long run embracing gambles with negative expectations will make you a loser. Many problem gamblers have had to learn this lesson the hard way.

While hope is an antidote to risk aversion that keeps us from taking up good gambles, fear is an antidote to risk proneness that makes us all too eager to take up bad gambles. The proper balance of hope and fear is instrumental in regulating risk-taking behavior in life.

In Matthew's parable, the master not only blames the servant for cowardice but also for sloth in refusing to take up a good gamble. Cowardice is what keeps the servant from taking up the risky opportunity. And by not taking up the opportunity, he need not take any initiative, catering to his sloth. Hope offers a mirror image. It gives us the courage to take up the risky opportunity. This is what we learned from Samuelson's gamble. In addition, it provides the drive to make the investment pay off.

A Subtle Glutton

'Hope is a subtle glutton; He feeds upon the fair,' Dickinson writes at a later age and in a more somber mood. So far, we have sung the praises of hope. However, there are some distinctly darker sides to hope. Hope can lead to *complacency*, may leave us *frustrated*, needlessly *raises expectations*,

ruins the prospect of *surprise*, can carry *wishful thinking* in its wake, and may spawn *obsession*.

Complacency. Granted, hope may provide respite, but respite can be dangerous. In Dickinson's poem, hope is seated at 'the halcyon table'—an idyllic place—but there is abstinence and solitude. While we are enjoying the respite, we suppress the need to make changes. Hope makes the abstinence and solitude bearable, and yet life passes us by. Without the comfort of hope, we would have rebelled and maybe made the changes that needed making. '[Religion] is the opium of the people,' Marx famously writes in the introduction to the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. One could make the same claim about hope. Hope makes the ache of yearning bearable, and so long as it is bearable, we do not seek change. So long as the peasants continue hoping that next year's harvest will be better, they won't revolt.

Hoping can be plain foolishness. Hoping that your partner will quit drinking keeps you from leaving them. Hoping that an estranged lover will come back stops you from searching for new love. Hoping that a skin abnormality is just an innocent blotch keeps you from getting checked for skin cancer. And the list goes on. When the situation calls for asking scary questions or taking radical steps, the hope that there is a simple way out stops us from doing what needs doing.

Frustration. There is the frustration of unfulfilled hopes. What we fear is the hangover from hoping. We do not dare to hope—better to let things be, let life unfold, and enjoy it as it comes. Granted, without hoping, there can also be frustration—simply because we did not get what we wanted. But it is hope's imagery of how wonderful things would be that makes not getting what we want more painful. With unfulfilled hopes, there are broken dreams.

Hume, in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Bk III, Part III, Sect. II) writes: 'Men generally fix their affections more on what they are possessed of, than on what they never enjoyed.' This is what behavioral scientists call the 'endowment effect': It is worse to have something taken from us than for it never to have been given at all. In the case of hope, what we want has not been given yet. But we did have something that resembled it—the mental imagery that we once cherished. And having that taken

away from us registers as a loss. A kind of shadow endowment effect explains why hoping increases our sense of frustration. One might say: 'People fix their affections more on that of which they have formed a mental image, than on that of which they have never formed such a mental image.'

Raised Expectations. Hoping involves forming a picture of how wonderful things will be. We fill in the details like a prospective bride or groom fill in the fine details of their wedding day. And then, when the time comes, things may just not be quite the way we had hoped them to be. They were nice alright, but not quite what we had hoped for. Had we not hoped, then we would have enjoyed every bit of it. But after all the hoping we did, reality let us down. The actual experience did not live up to our hopes; it was blander, less verdant, just a bit more ordinary than the fairy tale we had pictured it to be.

Loss of Surprise. If hoping is such a good thing, then what is so great about surprises? Why would we ever want to surprise someone if we could tell them beforehand of the wonderful things that might happen? Then they could have the pleasure of hoping for it and, on top of that, the pleasure of experiencing it. But this is not how the calculus of joy works. If you have been hoping for that birthday party, then you can still enjoy it when it comes, but you won't have that burst of joy that comes when you see the surprise guests gathered in your living room. And we want some of this in life as well—a burst rather than a slow build-up.

Wishful Thinking. What is the chance that I will win the lottery? That my love will be requited? Or that my cancer is curable? We should not kid ourselves and think that the chances are higher than the evidence dictates. To do so is wishful thinking. The danger of hoping is that the lure of wishful thinking becomes much more difficult to resist. This is not to say that it is impossible to hope while remaining sober-minded about the evidence. But just as it is harder to exercise self-control when the peanuts are within reach, it is harder to stick to the evidence and nothing but the evidence while hoping. But why would this be so? I have two suggestions.

Too much mental imagery may obscure the line between reality and fantasy. Consider how difficult it is to determine whether our images of early childhood events are real memories or false memories based on stories told to us at an older age. Similarly, the distinction between reality and the mental images we form in hoping is easily obfuscated. And in the absence of this distinction, our capacity to form beliefs based on the available evidence vanishes.

Hoping also affects our resolve, and, in many cases, this raises the chance that what we hope will come about. We mistakenly generalize this feature to hoping at large. Indeed, sometimes hoping makes things so—or, at least, it helps make things so. Hoping that I can jump the creek indeed increases my chances of success. But hoping that the sun will shine on next Sunday's picnic does nothing to increase the chance of sunshine. Our mistake is to transfer the boost in the chance of success in cases when hope makes a difference to cases in which the most fervent hopes cannot make one jot of difference.

Obsession. Hope, writes Dickinson, is 'A Patent of the Heart.' As such, it is scarcely under the control of the will. Our hopes often do not make much sense. The chances are too small. We may be fully cognizant that what we hope for would not make our lives any better. And, hoping may come to feel like thousands of little ping-pong balls ricocheting off the walls of our cranial cavity. Hope may wear us out. It may make demands on our mental life that make it impossible to attend to our affairs. And we may catch ourselves obsessively hoping for trifles at the expense of being properly affected by what is genuinely important in life.

Hope and fear can be instrumental in helping us plot the route ahead. But fear can become a phobia that barely tracks harm, and it can turn into paralyzing despair. Similarly, hope can become a *philia*, in the sense of an unhealthy attraction, that fails to track benefits and can become so overwhelming that it blocks normal functioning.

Mind you, hope does not *need* to be costly. Some people manage to hope scot-free. Much depends on one's character and situation. If there are no radical changes to be made, then the concern that hope induces complacency is misplaced. Some people have a strong frustration tolerance and shrug off their losses. They say: 'At least, I had something

to hope for.' Throughout hoping, one may retain a keen sense of reality and accurately assess chances. And many people can hope without any risk of hope slipping into obsession. Like the benefits, the costs of hoping are contingent—they do not define hoping.

We often don't know whether hoping will pay off or cost us dearly. Hoping itself is a gamble—much may be gained, yet much may be lost. Doing a risk analysis is murky, and we are in for the unexpected. But no matter, since hope is patented by the heart, we often have little control over it anyway. Our mode and measure of hoping is deeply engrained in our psychology. We find ourselves hoping for some things or failing to hope for others. We can try to hope or not to hope. We can encourage or discourage it in the young or in loved ones. But we are, at least to some extent, at hope's mercy.

Shameful Hopes

A few years ago, I was doing a rough stint of administration with an agenda chockful of appointments. My responsibilities were going to come to an end soon, and I was looking forward to a period of uninterrupted writing during a sabbatical. I had envisioned renting a cabin in the Montana wilderness with the change of seasons as a backdrop for my routine. I heard Greta Garbo's voice in my head saying 'I want to be alone.' Then, as luck would have it, one of my colleagues suggested that I apply for a fellowship at a prestigious university—there would be interesting seminars, discussions, a social context. It made a lot of sense—a lot more sense than the hare-brained Montana idea. Montana would be fun for a few hours, possibly days, and then the intellectual solitude would drive me crazy. The fellowship would be both fun, interesting, and productive. The choice was easy—I applied for the fellowship.

However, whenever I thought about the time ahead, all I could do was envision myself writing by a woodstove snowed in, in my Montana cabin. A fit-to-purpose office on a university campus in a large city, the philosophical discussions in seminar rooms, or any of the pleasures and privileges that the fellowship would provide had no draw on my imagination whatsoever. When I was awarded the fellowship, my heart sank just a tiny little bit. And yet, there was no choice. I accepted the

offer the day I received it and un-bookmarked the website of Montana cabin rentals. Certainly, I did the right thing and had a wonderful and productive time.

I write these words with a sense of shame, especially to the institution that hosted my fellowship. But I trust they will forgive me since I am trying to make a philosophical point. Part of me wanted to go to Montana. Part of me wanted to take up a fellowship. Both were distinct possibilities. On balance, there was no question—the Montana desire was ill-considered, especially given the alternative. And this was so, not just for professional reasons, but also considering what would be conducive to my happiness, however conceived. And yet, only the Montana desire gained entrance to my mental imagery.

What was I hoping for? To rent a cabin in Montana or to take up a fellowship? After I had applied for the fellowship but before being awarded it, I would have said that I hoped to rent a cabin in Montana, but I knew that it made little sense. Hope may track what part of us wants and it is not necessarily the part that puts the most weight on the scale. Hoping does not require that we endorse or validate what part of us wants. I, for one, certainly find myself hoping for things that hardly make any sense. I may not scream it from the rooftops, but there is no denying it: I was hoping to spend my sabbatical in a cabin in Montana.

Things can get much more tragic. It's not just hare-brained desires that spill over into full-fledged hoping, but also desires that are blocked by morality and social taboos. The Japanese author Minae Mizumura recently published a serial novel, *The Inheritance of Mother*, in which she talks about the hardships of a daughter caring for an aging and ailing mother. This is a duty that is very much part of Japanese mores. And yet, the seemingly unending day-to-day demands impose such a strain on the caregiver's life that it becomes undeniable that at least part of her wants the end to be near.

The novel is partly autobiographical, and Mizumura documents sitting at the bedside of her ailing mother while writing the book as a serial novel for a Japanese newspaper. The words 'Mom, when are you ever going to die?' became a subtitle for the original publication of the novel. 'These blunt words [...] echoed my thoughts at the time,' she writes in a *New York Times* (9 May 2014) opinion piece entitled 'Please, Mother, Enough.' Is she hoping for her mother to die earlier rather than

later? Clearly, she takes this to be a possibility yet not a certainty, part of her wants it, and she engages in the mental imagery of a life free from the burdens of taking care of her ailing mother.

One might object that she hopes for a life free of care giving earlier rather than later, but she does not hope for her mother to die. But a life free of care giving is so close to a life in which her mother has passed away, that it would seem disingenuous to say that she hopes for one thing without hoping for the other. The image of her being free from care giving is an image of a world in which her mother is no more. All in all, it may not be what she wants—it may only be what part of her wants. But it is the part that occupies her imagination. And as such it is like my mental imagery of a cabin in Montana. Hence, it's reasonable to say that the daughter is hoping for her mother to die, much like I was hoping to spend my sabbatical in a cabin in Montana.

Shameful hopes can also be a kind of anticipatory *Schadenfreude.* We secretly hope that others, even loved ones, will fail in their endeavors or that bad luck will befall them. Those dark desires are fed by various springs. The failure or bad luck would make us look better in comparison. It would give us a role as a confidant. It would feed our sense of self-importance. It would give us a story to tell in company. It would provide us with an opportunity for caretaking, offering meaning to our lives. The springs of darkness are all around us.

This is the reason why people sometimes reject expressions of support or alleged sympathy. They distrust the offer. They feel that they are being used to satisfy others' secret hopes, however well-intentioned the support may seem, even to the person who is lending a hand.

There is a Jewish story about a farmer who comes to the rabbi asking for advice about what to do with his sick goat. The rabbi admonishes him to take the goat in the house, have the goat eat at the dinner table and sleep in his bed. When the goat finally dies, the rabbi says: 'That is so unfortunate because I still had so much good advice to give to you.'

The rabbi is taking the farmer for a ride. But even if the advice had been useful, there is something suspect about the rabbi's interventions. The rabbi wants the goat to remain sick so that he can continue dispensing good advice. And this can become a shameful hope. It is the hope of a support person who wants, or at least part of them wants, their role to persist. This desire may not outweigh the concurrent desire

that the problem be resolved. But it may nonetheless take a front-row seat in mental imagery.

Most of the time, we succeed in keeping our shameful hopes secret. But they may come out in an unguarded moment. This is what happens to the rabbi: Condolences are in order, but in speaking of what he deems to be unfortunate, he mentions the loss of his advisory role rather than the goat's death. But what if we keep a close eye on our secret hopes and can lock them carefully within? Should we feel guilty about them? Are they not, after all, a mirror to the soul, and do they not bode ill of what lies within?

Religions offer us a tool in the form of the supernatural to keep the responsibility for secret hopes at bay through the practice of prayer and the prohibition on curses. Praying and cursing are much more under the control of the will than hoping. If I find myself secretively hoping for my mother to die, for bad luck to befall loved ones, or for the goat to remain ill, then I can find at least some peace of mind in saying that I prayed for a good outcome or that I never cursed to steer fate toward dark turns. We declare praying and cursing to be the expression of what is in our souls, thereby keeping our secret hopes beyond reproach.

In a secular context, there is a similar question about the permissibility of verbalizing secret hopes. There is a taboo against verbalizing a wish or a hope for one's mother to die. It is one thing to harbor such a secret hope. But it seems heartless to freely verbalize it. And yet, Mizumura's readers found catharsis in reading her novel and thanked her in a flood of letters. Her novel allowed them to accept their secret hopes, knowing that they were not alone.

Neighborhood

There are many phenomena in the neighborhood of hoping. Earlier, we said that hoping is a bit of thinking possible; a bit of wanting, even though it may just be what part of us wants; and a bit of mentally tossing things around in one's head. As we deviate from this model, we end up in the suburbs of hoping, and this is where we find many of hope's cousins. Let us explore what happens when we wander away from hoping proper.

Could I hope for what I do not want? It is difficult to think of cases in which one hopes yet does not desire. Certainly, there are many cases in which we hope but it's not for what, all in all, we want—as in when I was hoping for the solitude of a Montana cabin. But this is just to say that hopes may follow what part of us wants.

There is the Christian injunction to pray for those who persecute us (Matt 5:44.) But we can pray while having no desire for the well-being of our tormentors. There is a space between praying and hoping. We can pray for what we hope for, but we need not hope for what we pray for. Prayer is in the neighborhood of hope, but it is distinct from hope.

Could I hope for what I consider to be impossible? I can wish for what is impossible, but I cannot hope for it. And even if I consider something near impossible, I might say that I am not really hoping for it—it's just a pipe dream.

In love, the heart may still hope for what the mind already knows to be impossible. But in this case, I think that the mind is divided. One part of us continues to believe what we know to be impossible, even against all the evidence. Hope rides on the belief—running counter to all evidence—that love still might take a turn for the better. The other part of us sees the writing on the wall and knows that love has reached a dead end. We hope against hope: The love-struck part of us hopes, whereas the sober part knows that there is nothing to base this hope on.

In politics, there are utopian hopes, such as the hope for world peace, though we know world peace to be virtually impossible. But world peace functions as a guiding ideal here. What we genuinely hope for is that there will be progress towards the ideal of world peace—and progress is, of course, something that might well happen.

Could I hope for what I am certain will be the case? How about: I have such great hopes for the upcoming Olympics. Can't I say this, even though I am fully confident that the Olympics will take place?

Sure, but having great hopes for something is not the same thing as hoping for something to be the case. Having great hopes for the Olympics this year is not the same as hoping that the Olympics will take place this year. If I have great hopes for the Olympics, then I hope that some good things will happen in the Olympics, say, that my country will

win some medals. And I am neither certain that will happen, nor that it won't happen.

Could I continue to hope after suppressing my mental imagery? Sometimes we catch ourselves daydreaming, and we try to stop ourselves in our tracks. We tell ourselves that it's not worth wasting our waking hours and will only lead to frustration. If we can't stop the mental imagery, then we continue to hope, against our better judgment. If we can stop it, then what is left are stifled hopes. But stifled hopes are no longer hopes, just as stifled screams are no longer screams.

Could I want something to be the case; think it possible, yet not certain; engage in mental imagery; and yet not be hoping? One might object that there is more to hoping than desiring, believing, and mental imagery—one should also have a positive frame and assume that things will turn out well.

There is the maxim that an optimist says the glass is half full, whereas a pessimist says that it is half empty. Similarly, a person who is hopeful considers what is hoped for to be a genuine possibility. They say: 'It's unlikely, but, hey, it's possible!' They do not say: 'Yeah, sure, it's possible, but it's so unlikely!' Seeing the glass as half full rather than half empty is *framing* the situation in a rosy manner.

Imagine that I am preparing for a garden party this weekend. Someone asks me what we will do if it rains. I respond that I am just going to *assume* that the weather will be fine. I have decided to go about my business on the supposition of blue skies. A hopeful person assumes that all shall be well, and this attitude is expressed in how they conduct themselves.

So, the objection goes: Shouldn't we build 'framing things in a positive light' and 'assuming that all shall be well' into our definition of hope?

I don't think so. Framing and assuming is what a hopeful person does. But there is a difference between hoping and being hopeful. Think about being by the bedside of a loved one who is seriously ill. At first, I may be hopeful—I entertain a positive frame of mind and assume that they will recover. But as worrisome test results come in, I may say: 'I continue hoping, but I am no longer hopeful.' I believe that recovery

is still possible, desire for it to happen, and let my mind drift to how wonderful it would be. However, I can no longer see things in a positive light or assume that things will be OK. And then, as death draws nearer and it becomes clear to me that recovery is just not possible anymore, I have to let go of hope as well. Hence, 'framing' and 'assuming' are part and parcel of being hopeful, not of hoping as such.

Summing up, hoping has many cousins—praying, wishing, dreaming, being hopeful—but none are hope proper.

Inner Strength

Frank Darabont's movie *The Shawshank Redemption*, based on Stephen King's novella 'Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption: Hope Springs Eternal' in *Different Seasons*, features a prison friendship between two inmates, Andy and Red. Andy and Red disagree on whether hope has any place in the dire circumstances they find themselves in. For Andy, hope is all there is to hang onto inside the prison walls—it is 'something that they can't get from you.' For Red, it makes no sense at all—it 'is a dangerous thing, hope can drive a man insane, has got no use on the inside.' Red marvels at Andy's capacity to continue hoping. 'Andy,' Red says, wore 'his freedom like an invisible coat,' which Red couldn't do. What Andy brought from the outside was a 'sense of his own worth,' and he had 'a kind of an inner light he carried around with him.'

One could just say that we know that there are pros and cons to hoping, and while Andy aims for the pros, Red heeds the cons. But what should we make of Red's claim that something about Andy makes it possible for him to hope well? Or of Andy's claim that hope itself is what fosters this something—'the something that they can't get from you'?

What is this something? For now, let us simply call it 'inner strength.' Suppose that Andy is right: Hope fosters inner strength. But Red is right as well: We should only give in to hope if we already have this inner strength. But then one might ask: What is the good of hoping, if, to hope well, we already need to have the inner strength that it fosters? Let us think more carefully about this curious cycle that hope is caught in.

What are the *inputs* to hoping well? What aspects of inner strength do we need to hope well? Hoping well requires *self-confidence*: It requires the confidence that all will turn out well for oneself. This is what keeps our mental imagery sunny and bright, what stops our hopes from turning into despair. Hoping well requires *self-control* to stop our mental imagery from becoming obsessive. And it requires the ability to stay realistic and not give into self-deception. We respect others by not deceiving them and we respect ourselves by not deceiving ourselves. Hence, hoping well requires a form of *self-respect*.

What are the *outputs* of hoping well? What kind of inner strength does it foster? Hoping helps us in exploring new pathways to reach our goals. This reinforces our *self-confidence*—the confidence that we will find a way and succeed. Hope brings respite. This permits us to take a deep breath, find our bearings, and not get carried away by the urgency or the madness of a situation. And with a cool head comes the capacity for *self-control*. And, in hoping that good things will come to our loved ones, we consider them to be worth hoping for. In hoping that good things will come to us, we consider ourselves to be worth hoping for, worthy of respect. So, hope strengthens our sense of *self-respect*.

Frank Darabont cast the African American actor Morgan Freeman in the role of Red. In Stephen King's novella Red is of Irish origin and from a poor part of town. In the movie Red's Irishness only comes in as a joke. When Andy asks him why they call him Red, he responds: 'Maybe it's because I am Irish.' Both in the novella and the movie, Red is from an underprivileged background with few opportunities. It is this lack of opportunities that makes hoping more of a mad endeavor, whereas Andy's social background is an environment in which setbacks could be overcome and in which there is ample reason to hope.

Self-confidence, *self-control,* and *self-respect* enter both as inputs and outputs of hoping well. But each of these aspects of inner strength gets a bit of a different spin when we spell them out as inputs or outputs of hope. Yet, they are all aspects of the same construct of inner strength. It is possible to have some aspects and lack others, yet they are intricately connected and correlated. If you have some aspects of inner strength, you are likely to have other aspects as well.

Hence, inner strength through hoping seems to be subject to the Matthew Principle: 'For whosoever has, to him shall be given.' (Matt

13:12) And it sounds like the have-nots are doomed. They shouldn't even try to hope, lest what little they have be taken from them.

In this respect, hope keeps company with many other good things in life. Think of meditation: I trust that meditating well can bring many good things to life such as stress reduction, concentration, self-awareness, happiness, and acceptance, but if you lack those things to begin with, good luck with meditating well. The same cyclical model holds for many life-enhancing activities, such as reasoning, showing sympathy, or being a good friend or lover. What is gained by doing them well often corresponds to what is needed to do them well in the first place.

But things are not so dire. There are ways for the have-nots to break into these cycles. However anxious you may be, there are ways to get into meditation. Granted, we should take small steps and not expect to meditate like the Dalai Lama from day one. We can expect to spiral up: As we take these steps, we build up our strengths, which in turn enables us to meditate better, which in turn will further build up our strengths, and so on.

And ditto with hope. We may lack the courage to hope. Hoping is not for us, we may think. Things will go wrong anyway. We will lose our bearings. It will drive us crazy. We don't have the strength to hope. And yet, we should take that bold step of hoping no matter what. And once we are in the business of hoping, we can work up the strength that helps us carry on and attain what we never thought possible before.

This move is at the core of Obama's book title *The Audacity of Hope*. Doing something audacious is doing something one has no business doing—because it's imprudent or because it's not one's place. So how could we be called upon to be so audacious as to hope? Well, at first, we may be like Red. Being from an impoverished Irish or Black background did not offer Red much reason for hope. His social world put too many roadblocks in place. Our situation in life may also be such that we lack the strength to hope well, fearing that hope will drag us into a downward spiral. We do not dare to hope. But then, it is through taking this audacious step toward hope that we come to find inner strength. And it is this inner strength that makes it possible for us to hope well—and, if life is kind enough, to make our hopes come true.