Book Review: How We Hope

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Martin, Adrienne M. How We Hope: *A Moral Psychology.*
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Hope, like so many other practical attitudes, seems to lend itself to a belief-desire analysis: I hope for an outcome that I believe to be possible (or probable) and that I desire to occur. So goes the "orthodox definition of hope," whose inadequacies prompt Adrienne Martin to offer a new account of the phenomenon in her book *How We Hope: A Moral Psychology.* Martin imagines a pair of cancer patients who share the relevant beliefs and desires but differ in respect of hope. For Bess, the possibility that she will be among the 1 percent who gets cured is "what keeps her going"; whereas Alan, noting how poor a 1 percent chance is, is unwilling to rest any of his thoughts, feelings, or plans on that slim possibility. How should we capture the difference in hopefulness between Bess and Alan?

Consider the sometimes physical but often mental forms of agency that are characteristic expressions of hope and hopefulness. Happily imagining the hoped for outcome and planning on the basis of the outcome's occurrence would be two paradigmatic examples of such 'hope-activities'. If Martin is correct, to hope is to take one's desire (for the outcome) and one's belief (as to the likelihood of its coming about) to give one reason to engage in hope-activities. Martin charges the orthodox definition with failing to capture the fact that the person in question sees her situation in a way that offers a justificatory rationale for hoping. Martin calls the rational connection she establishes between, on the one hand, the belief and desire and, on the other, hope-activities, "incorporation." She says that hope involves incorporating both the desire and the belief into one's rational agency.

The incorporation of the desire-element involves a familiarly Kantian story about the possibility of stepping back from some unreasoned attraction and evaluating it from the standpoint of practical rationality. Indeed, Martin calls her view the "incorporation view" as a nod to Henry Allison's presentation of Kant's ethics, on which desire can move us only when it has been incorporated into our maxim. It is with her idea of the rational incorporation of belief that Martin strikes out into new moral psychological territory. The belief-element of hope represents a piece of theoretical reasoning: it is a probabilistic assessment, made on the basis of evidence, of the likelihood that the desired outcome occurs. The incorporation of the belief is, however, entirely due to practical reasoning: if a rational agent deems herself to have practical reason to engage in hope-activities, she will take a 'licensing stance' toward the belief. The very same probability will look one way to the agent who takes it to license hope and another way to the one who doesn't. So, for instance, Alan says "I might be cured, but it is very unlikely," whereas Bess says "it is very unlikely, but I might be cured." While agreeing that they have a 1 percent chance, they see this probability in different ways.

I want to raise two objections to Martin's claim that hope involves the rational incorporation of belief. The first concerns whether there is anything there to incorporate.

It is a peculiarity of Martin's view that the subject of hope must form a probabilistic assessment of the desired outcome and then, regardless of the numerical value of the estimate, 'see it as' the claim that the outcome is possible. Since any probability estimate can be 'seen' in this optimistic way, the account seems to have the agent undoing her own cognitive work. I think Martin may be misled by her framing example of Alan and Bess into thinking that we always make (even approximate) probability estimates with respect to those outcomes for which we hope. If that were so, we would be rationally required to preface our hope-activities by seeking evidence on the basis of which we would form such a judgment. But hope does not require us to seek such information; it is possible for someone to hope without having any view as to whether the outcome is likely or unlikely. When doctors give us odds, we cannot get around forming beliefs as to the likelihood that we will survive, but that seems to me to be an artifact of a specific kind of case. Moreover, even in that case hope directs our attention away from the medical estimations of probability onto the fact of possibility. This suggests that we should not write the probability estimate into the definition of hope.

But perhaps it would be possible to recast Martin's view so that what the hopeful person 'sees as' licensing hope is something other than a probability estimate. Since 'seeing as' need not take propositions as its arguments, Martin could alter her view so that what the hopeful person sees as licensing hope is her situation, or her life, or her circumstances. To see her life as licensing hope would, then, be to see her life optimistically, as that in which good things can happen.

My second objection to belief incorporation concerns Martin's claim that seeing (either a proposition or) her life in this way is a condition a person can reason her way into. The claim that we can see something in one way as opposed to another as a response to deliberation is a key claim for Martin's view, and it represents an extension of reasons-internalism into a new domain. Is the imagination subject to regulation by practical reason? Martin argues that it is, describing a case in which someone takes on the project of coming to see an abstract painting as a landscape: "with some effort, or perhaps with some instruction, the viewer can learn to see the landscape in the layers. . . . Once she has this knowhow, she can shift between seeing it as only washes of color and seeing it as a landscape. Moreover, she can shift *in response to practical considerations.* If someone offers her a reward to see it as a landscape, she can do so. Thus, if it is rational for her to take the means to getting the reward, it is rational for her to see the painting as a landscape" (49). Notice that this account of imagination-regulation is a two-stage account: Martin presents a first stage of learning to see the painting as a landscape and a second stage of having know-how and 'shifting' in response to reward. To which of the two are we to compare the process of coming to hope?

The learning process of the first stage bears a closer resemblance to the kind of change in perspective that one would have to undergo in order to transition from seeing's one's odds as Alan does to seeing them as Bess does. For it is here that the viewer experiences a genuine change in her way of seeing things. But Martin raises the issue of rational responsiveness only with respect to the second stage, and we can see

why. Learning to see the painting as a landscape is a process that takes some time and effort, over the course of which the subject will experience many failures to immediately achieve her end. Martin does not want to count these as irrationality. Rather, she would judge the subject who fails to 'shift' in response to practical considerations as irrational. Among our many practical skills lie what might be called skills of the imagination: memory tricks, mental maps, visualization techniques, practicing conversations with imaginary interlocutors, picturing one's audience naked, and so on. These forms of imaginative know-how are at the disposal of practical reason, like all of our other practical capacities. But this is not the kind of imaginative function at work in coming to hope, insofar as the latter aims at a cognitive change. I cannot muscle my mind into seeing something anew, not even with the force of reason.

A similar dilemma surfaces when Martin discusses the practical benefits of hope. Martin is committed to the existence of such benefits because they must ground the rationality of our hopes. Her view is that hope, or rather, the fantasizing activity in which hope characteristically manifests, sustains agency by supporting our ends with additional motivational impetus. Hope does not help us obtain the hoped-for outcome, but it does help us "find a new way of living well" in the absence of it (73). Or rather, it can do so: Martin is careful to note that hopeful fantasizing can also engender a kind of passivity that is destructive of agency. In order to rationally hope, I must have antecedent reason to believe that my hope-activities will be of the sustaining rather than the hindering kind. Martin suspects that more 'realistic' fantasizing will present less of a danger, citing psychological research to the effect that those whose fantasizing centers on how the end is to be brought fare better than those who merely represent the end as brought about. Perhaps I can fantasize in a controlled and 'realistic' way that presents no threat of hindering my agency. But such fantasy is not going to be very fantastical or imaginative—indeed, it is likely to closely resemble instrumental reasoning.

We arrive at the same dilemma: tactical fantasizing is just planning; creative fantasizing cannot be antecedently vouchsafed as rational. It seems we must choose between a form of imaginative mental activity that is responsive to reasons and one that is relevantly transformative. I am not convinced that this bind is inescapable, but I think getting out of it calls for a better account of how the imagination is, and how it is not, responsive to reasons. Specifically, we need an account of the kinds of reasons I can have for engaging in an activity whose output I cannot rationally anticipate.

In the final chapter, Martin sets off on a slightly different course. She explores hope as a reactive attitude, in the form of what she calls the 'normative hope' that we invest in others for the outcome of their acting well. This chapter is worth dwelling on, since Martin leverages her analysis of hope into some surprising conclusions about the connection between reactive attitudes and moral responsibility. Most philosophers working in this area accept a line of thought due to Strawson linking the propriety of a response of indignation or resentment to the violation of a normative expectation. Suppose it is true that your action, though hurtful to me, licenses not indignation but

only disappointment on my part or, in a positive case, that the right response from me is not mere normative satisfaction but gratitude. The Strawsonian line denies that the action in the first case could have been normatively forbidden and insists that the action in the second must have gone beyond what was normatively required.

Martin draws our attention to a set of cases which are problematic for this Strawsonian picture: in *helpful shopper* someone struggling with a load of groceries feels grateful to a passerby for picking up his dropped keys. He would have resented it if the unencumbered stranger had walked by without helping, but he is grateful that she did help. In *lying teenager* a father feels disappointed, rather than resentful, when he learns of his daughter's deception, but he would not have felt grateful had she told the truth, and he does feel that she violated a normative requirement.

Martin takes these examples to indicate the existence of an attitude closely related to but distinct from normative expectation: *normative hope*. We normatively hope that someone will fulfill a requirement, when, for instance, the person in question is not a full-fledged agent but only a confused teenager. One might fall short of expecting such a person to fulfill normative requirements but nonetheless in some sense hold her to them. Likewise, claims Martin, in a cultural environment that defaults to selfish behavior, it might be extraordinary for one stranger to help another. Even minimal acts of kindness might be proper objects of hope. Normative hope explains the fact that the father in *lying teenager* can feel disappointed in an action whose non-performance wouldn't have occasioned gratitude and the fact that the subject of *helpful shopper* feels gratitude for an action whose non-performance would have occasioned indignation.

Normative hope is a way of aspirationally holding someone to a principle. It explains why we might feel grateful for the ("mere") satisfaction of a norm or disappointed (rather than resentful) when the norm is violated. It is also compatible with the compresence of normative expectation, as when the beleaguered shopper would have felt indignant had the unencumbered passerby not stopped to help. Normative hope seems to me to be a powerful conceptual tool for invoking norms in cases in which the standard reactive attitudes account would be forced into denying that a principle is being violated or fulfilled. Specifically, it makes it possible for us to correctly articulate the distinctive ways in which emotions such as gratitude and disappointment hold others up to normative standards. Martin goes on to deploy the concept of normative hope to explain some puzzling features of our moral responses to vicious people. When someone from whom we do not expect much—suppose she has acted badly in the past—behaves badly once again, we many not feel indignation or resentment but mere disappointment. This is not a sign that we do not hold such a person to normative standards but rather that we do not hold her to them in the same way.

Martin's book is rich in ways I have not been able to capture in this brief overview. She engages with work in the history of philosophy—Aquinas, Hume, Kant, and Gabriel Marcel—not merely in passing but by treating these thinkers as real interlocutors. With respect to current debates on reasons-internalism, or the role of deliberative guidance in motivation, she is not content to merely situate her position but both rehearses and

adds to existing arguments so as to establish her view from the ground up. She often ventures into territory not yet on our moral psychological map: I have mentioned her innovative discussion of quasi-reactive attitudes, but I have not had room to discuss, for instance, her defense of the possibility of hoping for outcomes one cannot conceive of.

The distinctive feature of Martin's account is the way in which it casts hope as rational. I've criticized this rationalism by way of presenting a dilemma for her account of the imagination, but I should also note that Martin's ground-breaking account of normative hope is one of its dividends. For what she shows in her final chapter is that a proper analysis of the complexity of our moral responses calls for a form of hope that is rational—and this, of course, is just the point on which the previous argument of her book insists. Her book presents a compelling case against the orthodox definition and for the claim that some form of rationality is the key to a better understanding of hope. It is a nice illustration of the possibility that if we attend to the distinctiveness of the kinds of mental states of which we are capable, the upshot will be a better understanding of our mental and our moral life.

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