American Philosophical Quarterly
Volume 59, Number 3, July 2022

THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF HOPE

Jack M. C. Kwong

ABSTRACT

What is the phenomenology of hope? A common view is that hope has a generally positive and pleasant affective tone. This rosy depiction, however, has recently been challenged. Certain hopes, it has been objected, are such that they are either entirely negative in valence or neutral in tone. In this paper, I argue that this challenge has only limited success. In particular, I show that it only applies to one sense of hope but leaves another sense—one that is implicitly but widely employed in the hope literature—untouched. Moreover, I argue that hope construed in this latter sense is inherently positively valenced. The paper concludes by discussing some of the implications of this defense of hope's positive phenomenology, including the ontological question of whether hope is an emotion.

1. Introduction

Hope is generally considered to have a positive and pleasant phenomenology. Given that we hope only for outcomes that we desire and regard as valuable, we experience pleasure, among other things, in anticipating and fantasizing about their realization. The idea that hope has a positive affective tone, however, should not be taken to mean that it consists *only* of a pleasurable phenomenology. On a common conception of the attitude, hope not only requires that we desire a particular outcome but also that we believe that its obtainment is possible. Part and parcel of this doxastic component, of course, is the belief, however unwelcome, that the outcome may fail to obtain. When confronted by such a possibility, we experience fear and anxiety. Proponents of hope's positive affective tone should therefore be understood as claiming that hope's phenomenology—the "what it is like" component—is overall more pleasurable than not.

This rosy view of hope, however, has recently come under attack. Despite the fact that the objects of our hopes are desired and valued, some are such that they are dominated or constituted by fear. For example, Katie Stockdale argues that when the object of a hope concerns an outcome that we perceive as threatening, the resulting "fearful hope" would be entirely negatively valenced (Stockdale 2019). Thus, a patient who is hoping that the latest round of medical examination will indicate that her cancer is in remission would experience fear and anxiety, so much so that these negative emotions constitute the emotion. Generalizing on Stockdale's point, we could similarly reason that hopes for mundane or low-staked outcomes as their objects would, all things equal, be neither positive nor negative in valence (e.g., I hope that we will get nice weather next week). In short, accordingly, there are grounds to reject the characterization that hope is inherently or necessarily positive.

In contrast, this paper will defend the thesis that hope always has a positive phenomenology. In particular, I will show that the challenge against it is applicable only to one sense of hope but leaves the other sense untouched. The strategy is not to appeal to some idiosyncratic understanding of hope but to one that is implicitly albeit widely assumed in the hope literature. Specifically, my contention is that hope can be construed either as *hoping*, that is, as something that we do (e.g., I hope or am hoping that I will get the promotion), or as *hopefulness*, that is, as something that we possess (e.g., I am hopeful or have hope that I will get the promotion). Taken in the latter sense, I argue that hope *is* inherently positively valenced and is what theorists have in mind in making the same claim. To establish these conclusions, the paper will be structured as follows: The first section examines some of the arguments against the idea that hope is inherently positive in nature, with particular attention paid to Stockdale's notion of fearful hopes. The second section discusses the nature of hope and shows that it can be understood in two distinct but often confused senses, namely, between hoping and hopefulness. Next, I argue that it is important to distinguish these two senses because each yields a different answer to the query whether hope has a positive phenomenology. To conclude, I discuss some of the implications of my argument, including the ontological question of whether hope is an emotion.

2. Fearful Hopes

Hope is a mental attitude that we entertain in the face of an uncertain future. Although we do not know how things will unfold, we do know, in many instances, how we would like them to come to pass. For example, Lily does not know who will win the presidential election but knows which candidate she would like to prevail. Hope is one way to respond to such uncertainty. Thus, Lily's hope that her candidate will win reflects her desire that the election will turn out in a specific way. Importantly, this desired outcome is one that she not only regards as good and valuable (e.g., she agrees with the candidate's platform and believes that it will best serve the country) but also believes can be obtained; that is, she takes the outcome's obtainment to be neither an impossibility nor a certainty. Armed with this hope, she casts her ballot with great enthusiasm, anticipating the election result to go a certain way, and fantasizing about how good it would be for her candidate to win.

There are other respects in which hope as a response to uncertainty is positive. Philip Pettit, for instance, has pointed out that hope construed as a sort of "cognitive resolve" that things will turn out as desired, keeps us from losing heart and lessens the emotional pull from the "ups and downs" of conflicting evidence (Pettit 2004). Others, like Margaret Urban Walker, have additionally noted that hope can motivate and inspire us to exercise our agency to do what we can to help bring about the desired outcome (Walker 2006; Pettit 2004). The present paper, however, will principally be concerned with hope's positivity as it concerns its affective tone, that is, its "what it is like" component (Nagel 1974). In this regard, many philosophers have argued that the consciously felt quale of hope is essentially pleasant (e.g., Aquinas; Hobbes; Hume; Bovens; Meirav; Pettit; Walker). When we hope, we experience enthusiasm, and the pleasures associated with anticipation and the fantasy of the realization of what we desire. Hope also calms, relieves, and reassures us in the face of uncertainty. In this regard, Ariel Meirav claims that hope can brace and comfort us when our hoped-for outcomes fail to obtain, for people who hope trust that such failures would occur for a good reason (Meirav 2009). Additionally, Luc Bovens, noting in particular the pleasures of anticipation, argues that hope is intrinsically valuable, and that a person is better off hoping than not (Bovens 1999).

That hope is generally thought to have an inherently positive affective tone, however, does not imply that it consists *only* of pleasant experiences. To be uncertain about the future is to not know how it will turn out. We can hope that events will occur in a way that accords with our desires, but we also recognize that they might not, in which case we experience fear and anxiety. For example, although Marilee hopes to receive a bank loan for her small business to stay afloat, she worries that her application may be denied and fears the repercussions to follow. Advocates of the thesis that hope has a positive phenomenology would thus acknowledge that hope can exist alongside fear and anxiety but claim that people with hope will experience on balance more pleasant than negative feelings. Indeed, an important role that hope plays is that it counteracts negative emotions that may arise; that is, we hope *in spite of* our worries. Adrienne Martin's example of the late-stage cancer patient Bess can be used to illustrate this point. Although there is less than 1 percent chance that she will be cured by the experimental drug, Bess nevertheless "hopes against hope" by focusing on the very possibility that a cure exists and justifies seeing the 1 percent in this light because doing so can help her achieve her remaining schemes and ends in her life plan (Martin 2015). In hoping against hope, far from unravelling and despairing, she holds up, experiences some of the aforementioned pleasures, and maintains a positive outlook.

Against this picture of hope's having a positive affective tone, Stockdale has recently argued that some hopes are entirely negatively valenced (Stockdale 2019). Specifically, she suggests that we experience "fearful hopes" when we hope for outcomes that we perceive as threatening. As illustration, Stockdale discusses the example of a woman who hopes that she will not be assaulted or harassed by men, a prospect that she perceives as a dangerous threat. According to Stockdale, the woman's hope is not just accompanied by the emotion of fear but is *constituted* by it.[1] Her hope is colored and overwhelmed by fear, and as such, is entirely negatively valenced. Stockdale thus concludes that "what distinguishes pleasant hopes from unpleasant hopes is the object of hope: Pleasant hopes are for happy outcomes, whereas fearful hopes are about escaping a threat" (Stockdale 2019, p. 119). Furthermore, she notes that fearful hopes are ubiquitous, arising not just under nonideal conditions (e.g., hopes entertained by members of underrepresented groups in the face of oppression) but also under ordinary circumstances (e.g., a hope that the presence of mold in a part of the attic is not indicative of pervasive infestation).

In my view, Stockdale's argument can easily be extended to further challenge the view that hope is inherently positive in affective tone. If the tone of a hope is fixed by its object, as Stockdale maintains, then we can infer that perhaps hopes with mundane and low-stakes objects would have neither a positive nor a negative tone. Instead, it would have a neutral one. For example, my hope that the cilantro I just bought at the store will not wilt too quickly does not have a positive or a negative affective tone, *ceteris paribus*. I simply do not care enough about this outcome or am not sufficiently invested in it.[2] Furthermore, I may entertain this hope only fleetingly, without anticipating or fantasizing about its obtainment. As such, I feel *nothing* in hoping for it. To insist that my hope must be positive in valence (as opposed to being neutral) seems to be an overreach.

To sum up, the dispute in question concerns whether hope has a positive phenomenology. On the one hand, those who think that it does attribute this feature to the fact that people who hope experience certain pleasures. On the other hand, those who reject it claim that not all hopes are accompanied by pleasant feelings, since some are entirely negatively valenced (e.g., fearful hopes) while others are

neutral. Who is right? In what follows, I will argue that both are correct to some extent. My assessment of this dispute is that the two camps may be talking past one another and have different targets in mind when they use the word "hope." To show this, the next section will examine the nature of hope.

3. What Is Hope?

There are many different angles from which to examine hope. As we have seen, one such angle is in reference to its objects—the hoped-for outcomes—which in turn suggests that hope is a relation to which we stand to these objects. We also noted that the object or outcome for which we hope is one that we desire and regard as valuable and believe its obtainment to be possible (that is, neither certain nor impossible). A plausible definition of hope, then, is:

> **Hope$_v$**: To hope for an outcome is to desire it and to believe that its realization is possible

In my view, there is much to commend about **Hope$_v$**, which defines hope as a *verb* or as something that we do.[3] Its greatest strength, I contend, is that it accurately captures a wide variety of instances of hopes. Consider the following examples: (a) Bess hopes that her cancer will be cured by the experimental drug; (b) Letitia hopes that she has the winning lottery ticket; (c) Montrose hopes that he will be admitted to law school; (d) George hopes that the rain will stop before his soccer game; (e) Greta hopes that people will take climate change seriously; (f) Atticus hopes that his car will not require significant repairs; (g) Ruby hopes that her meal will be tasty; (h) Hippolyta hopes that her children will lead happy and rewarding lives; (i) Caleb hopes that the roller coaster ride will be exhilarating.

These examples represent a wide range of hopes for outcomes that are: mundane and low-stakes (b, d, g, i);[4] substantial and high stakes (a, c, e, f); episodic and fleeting (d, g, i); enduring (e, h); transformative (a, c); happy (g, h, i); threatening (a, e); passive and outside the scope of one's agency (a, b, d, f, g); active and within the means of one's agency (c, e, h). There are undoubtedly other ways to characterize objects of hope. Suffice it for now to note that what unites these diverse examples is the fact that the individual in each desires the outcome in question and believes that its obtainment is possible. What hoping does, I submit, is the minimal act of consciously registering that one has a certain desire, the outcome of which is believed to be realizable (Kwong 2020; 2022).[5] Importantly, hoping construed in this way does not require us to act on our hopes or have any feelings about them. Thus, for some hopes, we do everything we can to help realize them, while for others, we do absolutely nothing; for some hopes, we constantly think about them, while for others, we quickly forget them after momentarily entertaining them; for some hopes, we have positive and upbeat feelings, while for others, we experience fear and trepidation, or a complete lack of feelings. What the foregoing discussion reveals is that the mental act of hoping *per se* does not demand that we act or feel a certain way. All that it requires is that we desire an outcome the obtainment of which we believe to be possible.

When we construe hope in such minimal terms as specified in **Hope$_v$**, we see that Stockdale is correct to conclude that hope is not necessarily positively valenced. In light of the foregoing discussion, I would add the important qualification that *hoping*, or hope construed as a verb, is not necessarily positively valenced.[6] To reiterate, hoping is compatible with a range of feelings or contrarily, with their absence. Its valence therefore can be either negative or neutral. Accordingly, when we hope for outcomes that we perceive as threatening, we experience hopes that are valenced and constituted by fear; when we hope for outcomes that we regard as happy, our experience is positively valenced; when we hope for outcomes that we do not care

much about, we experience indifference. Stockdale's conclusion is thus true on **Hope**$_v$.[7]

Hope theorists have by and large rejected **Hope**$_v$, ruling it incomplete or false (Meirav 2009). Some objections against it argue that it fails to distinguish hope from despair (Meirav 2009); to explain how hope can structure and motivate our agency (Pettit 2004; Segal and Textor 2015); to explain "substantial hopes" (Pettit 2004) or "hoping against hope" (Martin 2015), and the like. To take an example, Meirav has argued that a person who despairs over an outcome, like one who hopes for it, also desires it and believes that its obtainment is possible. Consequently, he claims that the requirements of **Hope**$_v$ cannot be what distinguishes hope from despair. On the face of it, this seems like a devastating objection against **Hope**$_v$, and philosophers have for the most part agreed, which explains the proliferation of accounts of hope which seek to differentiate hope from despair by appeal to a third factor (e.g., Kwong 2019; Meirav 2009; Martin 2015; Milona and Stockdale 2018). But what has largely gone unnoticed, in my view, is that the objection based on despair, much like other objections drawn against **Hope**$_v$, betrays that these philosophers are not in fact talking about *hoping*. Instead, they are talking about something else when they use the term "hope".

To explain, consider Meirav's lottery example.[8] He purchases a lottery ticket and comes home "full of enthusiasm, showing the ticket to [his] wife and wanting to share with her [his] great hope in winning a sizeable monetary prize" (Meirav 2009, p. 223). Despite desiring to win and believing that winning is possible, his wife does not share his enthusiasm, and is instead indifferent and skeptical. The crucial point is, in Meirav's words: "We have the same desire to win, and assign winning the same probability. And yet I am hopeful of winning, and she is not. And this, of course, is incompatible with the Standard Account, according to which either both of us should hope or both of us should despair in these circumstances" (Meirav 2009, p. 224).

The putative incompatibility is that an adequate account of hope should exclude instances of despair (on the assumption that hope and despair are opposites). However, I submit that this is not necessarily true. The culprit is the implicit assumption that hoping is equivalent to being hopeful, such that if a person hopes for an outcome, she is *ipso facto* hopeful about it. As Meirav notes in the above example, what distinguishes his wife from him is that he is hopeful, and she is not. But why think that just because a person desires a certain outcome and believes its obtainment to be possible, she is by this fact hopeful? After all, we have seen that merely hoping for an outcome does not imply that one must feel good about it. One can instead feel bad, anxious, and fearful. Importantly, one can also feel despair or hopefulness when hoping for an outcome. It is thus *not* a contradiction to maintain that a person can hope for an outcome yet not feel hopeful that it will obtain. For example, the passenger who just learned that the plane has mechanical failure and will attempt a crash-landing from 10,000 ft. *hopes* that she will survive but certainly does not feel hopeful. If this line of reasoning is correct, the mere fact that a person hopes for an outcome does not mean that she is hopeful about it; on the contrary, she could be completely lacking in hopefulness and experience despair.

Two crucial conclusions can be drawn from this discussion. The first is that the objection from despair equivocates on the word "hope," which is sometimes used to refer to *hoping*, and other times, to *hopefulness*. Yet, these two senses of hope are distinct and are not interchangeable: A person can hope for an outcome *without* being hopeful about it.[9] In my view, this distinction can be used to accurately capture Meirav's wife's attitude: She hopes to win the lottery ("Who doesn't?") but

is not at all hopeful like her husband. To be clear, Meirav is correct to point out that an account is needed to differentiate hopefulness from despair; surely, he and his wife differ in attitude. Where he is mistaken, however, is to demand that **Hope**$_{\text{v}}$, which is an account of *hoping* but *not* of hopefulness, explain this difference.[10] The second conclusion is that Meirav is also correct to assume that hope precludes despair. However, this assumption is true only with respect to one sense of hope. When "hope" refers to hopefulness, which certainly is the way that some philosophers have construed the term (e.g., Meirav), it in fact precludes despair; they are opposites in that if one is hopeful, one cannot despair at the same time. However, when "hope" refers to hoping, which is also how it is construed by others in the hope literature (e.g., Stockdale; and also Meirav), it *does not* preclude despair. As I have been urging, we can hope for an outcome over which we experience great despair. For instance, members of oppressed groups hope for racial justice and equality yet remain largely unhopeful that it will obtain. In short, where there is hopefulness, there cannot be despair. But where there is hoping, there can be.

4. Is Hopefulness Positively Valenced?

What implications does the foregoing distinction between hoping and hopefulness have on the query whether hope is positive valenced? My view is that it can be used to establish one sense in which hope *is* positively valenced. As we have seen, "hope" can mean either hoping or being hopeful, and both senses have been employed, often confusedly, in the literature. Construed as hoping, hope is indeed *not* necessarily positively valenced, for the fact that a person desires an outcome believed to have a possibility of being realized does not make the experience of hoping inherently pleasant. However, construed as hopefulness, there are grounds to think that hope *is* positively valenced: Being hopeful has an inherent positive and pleasant affective tone, especially when contrasted with despair, which is assuredly a negative attitude and a painful experience.

What is it to be hopeful?[11] My suggestion is that it is a positive attitude we stand toward the chances that an object or outcome for which we are hoping will be realized (Kwong 2020; 2022). Consider what it is to be hopeful at the height of the pandemic that there will soon be a vaccine for COVID-19. Minimally, it is to hope that epidemiologists will manufacture a vaccine, which means that we desire such an outcome and believe it to fall within the realms of possibility. Additionally, it is to feel good about the chances or likelihood that this hoped-for outcome will be realized by entertaining positive thoughts and having good feelings about such chances.[12] For instance, we may be assured and comforted by the fact that epidemiologists from all around the world are working cooperatively toward this goal. When we are hopeful, we have a favorable assessment of the situation (e.g., we like our chances) and agreeable feelings toward the obtainment of the outcome (e.g., a feeling that there is a light at the end of the tunnel and that things more likely than not will soon return back to normal). In addition, we also feel enthusiasm, and the pleasures of anticipating and fantasizing about the benefits of the outcome like going to restaurants and attending parties again.

Crucially, whereas hoping is directed at a desired outcome believed to be obtainable, hopefulness is directed at the *chances* that such an outcome will be obtained. To be hopeful is to have a positive orientation toward such chances, which is to have positive thoughts and feelings about them.[13] We may be so positively oriented because we believe that the chances or probability that the outcome will be realized are high (and thereby,

feel good about them). This, however, is not a necessary requirement because we can also feel good about outcomes that we believe to have a low chance of obtaining (e.g., Meirav and his lottery ticket; Bess the late-stage cancer patient).[14] We may experience hopefulness for a variety of reasons, which include, for instance, seeing a path forward from where one stands to the obtainment of the outcome (Kwong 2019), believing that some outside factor is working in our favor (e.g., God, luck, or fate) (Meirav 2009), and seeing the prospect of the desired outcome as "encouraging to varying degrees" (Milona and Stockdale 2018). Any of these reasons can explain and reinforce our hopefulness regarding a hoped-for outcome. It is worth pointing out that hopefulness does not imply the absence of negative thoughts and feelings. A hopeful person may occasionally entertain doubts or have bad feelings about a hoped-for outcome. However, these negative thoughts and feelings would give way to positive ones in a hopeful person. To be hopeful is to have *on balance* more positive thoughts and feelings than negative ones.

Is hope positively valenced? When this question is rephrased as "Is hopefulness positively valenced?", the answer is yes. Given that hopefulness refers to a positive orientation one has toward the chances that a hoped-for outcome will obtain, its experience is pleasant, positive, and upbeat, and accompanied by the pleasures of anticipation, enthusiasm, and comfort. Hopefulness sustains our hoping, serving especially as an antidote to or safeguard against despair. For instance, a late-stage cancer patient may find it easy and tempting to despair in the face of a less than 1 percent chance of being cured. If she were to give in and sink into a dark emotional abyss, she would risk foregoing goals and ends in the remainder of her life, such as spending quality and meaningful time with her family or completing unfinished projects (Martin 2015). It would therefore be better for her to be hopeful, that is, to maintain a positive attitude and to proceed as if the experimental drug would succeed (Martin; Pettit). Whether the cancer patient can do so remains contentious; she may have little choice in the matter. What is not contentious, in my view, is that hopefulness, however a person comes by this attitude, is positively valenced and pleasant in its affective tone.[15]

Let us take stock of the argument. What I have shown above is that hope *can* and *cannot* be positively valenced. This is, of course, not a contradiction, for "hope" takes on a different sense for each conjunct to be true. Given that hope theorists have not distinguished the two senses of hope or at least not fully appreciated this distinction, the same word has been used to cover both senses, thus creating a false dilemma in deciding whether hope is positively valenced or not. Depending on which sense of hope they have in mind and thus, which related features of hope to focus on, they draw the expected conclusions.[16] For example, Stockdale's discussion of hope focuses on the act of hoping (especially) for outcomes perceived as threatening, and rightly concludes that such acts are not positively valenced (and thus, hope (read: hoping) is not necessarily positively valenced). By contrast, Meirav's discussion of hope revolves around hopefulness (that is, in contrast to despair), and *also* rightly concludes that hope (read: hopefulness) is positive in affective tone. It would be hasty to conclude that one side must be wrong whereas, in fact, these theorists simply talk past one another. By bringing the distinction of hoping and hopefulness to the fore, we see how they can both be right: Hope is positively valenced when it refers to hopefulness, and hope is not necessarily so when it refers to hoping. A simpler way to capture this is simply to say that hopefulness is positively valenced and hoping is not.

5. Two Implications of Hoping and Hopefulness

In this section, I would like to discuss two further implications of my argument. The first concerns the interplay between hoping and hopefulness, an issue that can shed further light on the question of what it is like to hope. Recall an earlier quote by Stockdale: "What distinguishes pleasant hopes from unpleasant hopes is the object of hope: pleasant hopes are for happy outcomes, whereas fearful hopes are about escaping a threat" (Stockdale 2019, p. 119). In light of the present paper's argument, we now have the resources to show that this thesis is not necessarily true. One way to establish this is to show that some hopes that are about escaping a threat can in fact be (somewhat) positive. The key, in my view, is to note that a person can hope for an outcome that she perceives to be threatening *and* be hopeful that the threat will not materialize. As I have pointed out, merely hoping for an outcome does not imply that a person is automatically hopeful about its chances of obtaining. She can either be *not* hopeful or she may not entertain any thoughts as to whether she feels hopeful or not. For instance, when a person suddenly finds herself in a threatening situation, although she hopes to escape it, she may not know at that point whether there are reasons to be hopeful that she will escape it. Alternatively, she may not have had the time to think about the question as to whether she is hopeful, despite that she is hoping for the outcome.

However, a person who hopes to get out of a threatening situation could also be hopeful that she will do so. For example, a woman facing the prospect of being catcalled and assaulted would, as Stockdale notes, experience much fear and trepidation in hoping not to be so threatened. However, if we were to modify the example and posit that the woman has a black belt in karate, she plausibly may feel differently in her hope (read: hoping). Although the situation remains threatening, the fact that she knows how to defend herself and to ward off her attackers could make her hopeful and give her confidence, comfort, and assurance. In such a scenario, her hope to escape the threat would not, *pace* Stockdale, be necessarily fearful; instead, it may be associated with pleasant feelings associated with confidence, courage, and skills, rendering her hope positive overall in affective tone.

My suspicion is that people who experience fearful hopes are ones who are either not additionally hopeful, or as mentioned, have not yet had time to consider whether they are hopeful or not. Indeed, we cannot just read off from Stockdale's example whether the woman is hopeful, though we can certainly conclude that she hopes to escape the threat. When a person is not hopeful, she does not feel good about the chances that her hope will be realized. Insofar as her hope is about escaping a threat, it is unsurprising that it would be constituted by fear. Furthermore, when a person has not had time to consider the question of hopefulness, she lacks an important resource to counteract the fear and trepidation associated with the prospect that the threat will be realized. My assessment is that Stockdale's thesis can already be challenged by thinking about Martin's example of the cancer patient as an instance of hoping against hope. In it, Bess faces the real threat of dying from cancer, which by Stockdale's argument would already render her hope fearful. Yet, the point of hoping against hope is that even under circumstances in which the hoped-for outcome's chances of being realized are extremely miniscule, people can nevertheless emerge hopeful. Bess, I contend, was like this. She was able to come up with a "justificatory scheme" for her hopefulness, and in so doing, experience some of its associated positive and pleasant feelings (Martin). In short, Bess countered her fear with hopefulness. As such, her hope to survive—which

is a real threat to her life—need not be necessarily fearful.

The second implication of my argument concerns hope's ontological status. Some theorists, like Stockdale and Michael Milona (Stockdale 2019; Milona and Stockdale 2018), have queried why hope is not straightforwardly discussed in the hope literature as an emotion. After all, they claim, hope is treated elsewhere, such as in the literature on emotions, as a paradigmatic example of an emotion. According to Stockdale, a possible explanation is that hope theorists have been reluctant to construe hope as an emotion because they do not want to be committed to any specific theory of emotion, an issue which remains controversial (Stockdale 2019, p. 127). Here, I would like to suggest an alternative hypothesis for their reluctance, and in so doing, propose an answer to the question of whether hope is an emotion. As I noted earlier, hope theorists have not fully appreciated the distinction between hoping and hopefulness, using the same word "hope" to cover both of these distinct mental phenomena. This is evident in the above quote by Meirav, whose discussion of hope shifts back and forth between hoping and hopefulness, which in turn generated the apparent puzzle that the standard account of hope fails to exclude experiences of despair.[17] The consequence of not separating these two senses of hope, then, is that when theorists use "hope," they sometimes have hoping in mind, and other times, hopefulness.

My suspicion is that these theorists have largely not thought of hope as an emotion because when they reflect on this issue, they really have *hoping* in mind. That is, they think of hope in terms of what it is for a person to hope, which we have seen is commonly treated as desiring an outcome and believing that its obtainment is possible (namely, **Hope**$_v$). But hoping in this sense is merely a mental act, on par with other propositional attitudes such as believing, desiring, planning, and expecting. More importantly, just as beliefs and desires are not treated as emotions, hope too is not similarly treated. Thus, even though hope sometimes seems to take on properties typical of an emotion—say, an affective tone or feel, or an evaluative component—as a mental act of desiring an outcome, it serves as an obstacle to prevent theorists from construing hope as an emotion. A tension thus arises: Hope has some features that seem to support the case that it is an emotion, but then it also has others that definitely rule it out. In deliberating whether hope is an emotion, I suspect features of the latter kind often prevail to render a negative verdict.

However, this tension is based on a confusion. The way to clear it up is to explicitly acknowledge that "hope" has two senses—hoping and hopefulness—and to clearly distinguish them. When we do this, we will see why hope *is* and *is not* an emotion. Take hoping first. Is hoping an emotion? When "hope" is construed this way, the answer is negative, for reasons stated above. By contrast, when we construe "hope" as hopefulness, and ask whether hope is an emotion, the answer is yes (or at least a strong "maybe"). There is little difficulty in making the case that hopefulness is an emotion. Understood as having good feelings and thoughts concerning the chances that a desired outcome will obtain, hopefulness has all of the basic properties of an emotion, being intentional, evaluative, affective, accompanied by bodily feelings, and motivational.[18] Thus, it is intentional in that it is directed at some object, namely, the chances that a desired outcome will obtain; it is evaluative in that it looks favorably upon such chances; it is affective in that it has a pleasant affective tone, consisting of pleasures associated with anticipation, comfort, and reassurance. Such pleasures also explain why hopefulness is accompanied by bodily

feelings; lastly, it is motivational in that when a person is hopeful, as opposed to despairing, she is likely to take steps *out of hopefulness* to help bring about an outcome.[19]

To sum up, the question as to whether hope is an emotion needs to be sharpened. It is difficult to answer because hope seems to have properties that both support and reject the case of its being considered an emotion. But this is so because "hope" is used to cover two distinct mental phenomena, and the appearance that hope has all of these properties is the consequence of a failure to distinguish them. However, when we make a distinction between hoping and hopefulness, we can see with greater clarity which sense of hope has the properties that make it the more likely candidate for being an emotion, and which, not. The question to ask, then, is not whether hope is an emotion, but rather, whether hoping is an emotion and whether hopefulness also is. The answers, as I have argued, are no and yes (or a strong maybe), respectively.

6. Conclusion

Does hope have a positive phenomenology? I have argued above that this question is ambiguous because of hope's two distinct senses: Hoping and hopefulness. Accordingly, when the question is phrased in terms of asking whether hoping has a positive phenomenology, the answer is negative. After all, to hope for an outcome is merely to desire an outcome and to believe that its obtainment is possible, a mental act that is compatible with a wide range of feelings, including joy on the one hand, and trepidation, on the other. We can also hope without feeling anything, in which case hoping has a neutral affective tone. By contrast, when the original question is purported to ask whether hopefulness has a positive phenomenology, the answer is affirmative. To be hopeful is to be positively oriented toward the chances that the outcome will occur and accompanied by positive feelings and thoughts. Additionally, I have argued that drawing this distinction between hoping and hopefulness in the context of considering hope's phenomenology enables us to make progress on the question whether hope is an emotion. Construed as a mental act of hoping, there is little justification to think it is an emotion, but as hopefulness, there are compelling reasons to argue that it is an emotion.

Appalachian State University

NOTES

I would like to thank Anna Cremaldi and Luke Kwong for their help and encouragement in writing this paper. I would also like to thank two anonymous referees for *American Philosophical Quarterly* for their insightful comments and suggestions.

1. Stockdale intends to contrast fearful hopes with those that are "emotionally ambivalent," namely, hopes that arise in response to uncertainty, fear, and anxiety. According to her, people who have such ambivalent hopes would have an experience of both positive and negative affective states, depending on whether they are attending to the possibility of their hoped-for outcome's obtaining or being frustrated (Stockdale 2019, p. 121). By contrast, fearful hopes are entirely negatively valenced in affective tone.

2. Despite not caring much or being sufficiently invested in this outcome, I nevertheless desire that it obtain. To paraphrase Bovens, I prefer a state of affairs in which my cilantro does not wilt too quickly than one in which it does (Bovens 1999).

3. Readers familiar with the hope literature will recognize that **Hope**$_v$ just is the standard account of hope. My decision to employ **Hope**$_v$, however, is strategic. In my view, the standard account of hope has

a bad rap, and is thought to be plagued with objections and thus, subsequently rejected. This, however, is a mistake, given that these objections demand that the standard account explain features belonging to a sense of hope that does not fall within its scope (see Kwong 2020; 2022). Construing the standard account as **Hope**$_{v}$ helps to remedy this, since **Hope**$_{v}$ emphasizes that it is principally concerned with hope as a verb or as something that we do. Once we circumscribe the standard account's scope of hope to *hoping*, we see that objections raised against it lose force and that a plausible account of hoping emerges.

4. Two points are worth noting here. First, these hopes are sometimes referred to as "superficial hopes" and contrasted with "substantial" ones (i.e., high stakes hopes in which we are heavily invested) (Pettit 2004). Second, evaluations of all of these instances of hope in this paragraph are intended to be read as containing a *ceteris paribus* clause. All things equal, Bella's hope that she has the winning lottery ticket, much like that of millions of other lottery ticket players, is mundane and low-stakes, even though there exist contexts in which her life may depend on it (e.g., she is on the brink of personal bankruptcy), in which case her hope may become substantial.

5. The requirement of "conscious registration" as a component of hoping, I believe, was implicitly assumed by the standard account, made explicit only later by Bovens on grounds that hoping cannot be latent in nature (Bovens 1999). In this respect, **Hope**$_{v}$ is closer to Bovens than the standard account, differing only in the respect that it construes Bovens's "mental imaging" requirement narrowly by requiring that a person in hoping must consciously register or be aware of her desired outcome (see Kwong 2020; 2022).

6. On this minimal definition of hope (that is, as hoping), we can see that other recent claims made about hope may be true on a similar basis. For example, Claudia Blöser has noted that hope is not necessarily motivational. As she points out, hope is "not necessarily motivating but can exist without (or even undermine) motivation" (Blöser 2019, p. 7). Construed as *hoping*, hope may well not be necessarily motivational, since we could momentarily hope for a mundane and low-stakes outcome without doing anything else about it.

7. On this question of whether *hoping* is positively valenced, Bovens offers a differing position by arguing that hoping has intrinsic value by providing for "pleasures for anticipation" and "satisfaction that one cannot attain from attending to one's actual circumstances" (Bovens 1999, pp. 675–676). As such, hoping, for him, is inherently positively valenced.

8. For an elaboration of this argument and the distinction of the following two senses of hope, see Kwong 2020 and 2022.

9. Another important reason to commend **Hope**$_{v}$ is that it can make sense of this idea that a person can hope without being hopeful.

10. For this reason, the standard account/**Hope**$_{v}$ survives Meirav's objection from despair and remains a viable account of hoping. In my view, other objections that have been raised against the standard account commit a similar mistake by demanding that it explain features that are outside its purview (specifically, by asking an account of *hoping* to explain properties of *hopefulness*) (Kwong 2020; 2022). To reiterate, the culprit in question is the faulty assumption that hoping for an outcome is tantamount to being hopeful about it. Once we abandon this assumption, these objections fail against the standard account. One consequence of my argument is that the standard account turns out to be a defensible account of hope (read: hoping) and ought to be taken seriously.

11. For alternative treatments of the relationship between hoping for a particular outcome and being hopeful, see Adam Kadlac (2017) and Patrick Shade (2001). For instance, Kadlac argues that a person's hopefulness can be explained by appeal to her specific hope that the future will be good. I am

sympathetic to this proposal, and think that this belief may well be found within a person's positive orientation towards the chances of a hoped-for outcome's obtaining.

12. It is worth noting that the expression "feel good" refers broadly to the general way or orientation one stands towards the chances that one's hoped-for outcome will be realized (namely, a positive one). Given that such an orientation consists of having both positive thoughts and feelings, a hopeful person will also "feel good" in the narrow sense of having good feelings about these chances.

13. As mentioned, I am construing "being hopeful" in terms of a person's possessing such a positive orientation (i.e., having positive thoughts and feelings toward the chances that her hoped-for outcome will obtain). However, as I suggest below, a case can be made that hopefulness may turn out to be an emotion, one that is partly constituted by the possession of such positive beliefs and feelings.

14. Conversely, we can also feel despair even when we believe that an outcome has a good chance of happening. For instance, people who think that they have a streak of bad luck will not feel hopeful about outcomes, though they recognize these as having a high probability of obtaining.

15. Recall that there are a number of attitudes a person can hold with respect to the chances that a hoped-for outcome will obtain; roughly, she could hold a positive, negative, or a neutral attitude toward them. My claim here is that an established and common sense of "hope" refers specifically to the positive attitude a person holds toward such chances (e.g., "I have hope that" or "I am hopeful that"), which my definition of hopefulness attempts to capture and characterize. As such, hope understood in this sense is *inherently* positive.

16. Notice that both senses equally deserve to be the target of the word "hope" and thus, merit serious consideration. Indeed, reading the hope literature in light of this distinction, one would see that some papers are clearly about hoping, while others are about hopefulness. For instance, Bovens's discussion of the value of hope, in my view, principally targets hoping or the value of hoping. In particular, he argues that the activity of hoping—that is, of expending energy in mental imaging a desired outcome believed to have some possibility of being realized—can be both instrumentally and intrinsically valuable (Bovens 1999). By contrast, Meirav's and Martin's are ultimately about hopefulness (despite premising their arguments on **Hope**$_{\text{v}}$, a strategy that I have argued here is misguided).

17. To reiterate, Meirav and others take this to be a *reductio* of the standard account, which I have called **Hope**$_{\text{v}}$ in this paper. Their view is that an account of hope should not include cases of despair. But as I have argued, their mistake is not drawing the distinction between hoping and hopefulness. It is consistent to maintain that a person could hope for a desired outcome, yet be unhopeful (or despairing) about it at the same time. What is contradictory to maintain is that a person is hopeful and despairing simultaneously, which is *not* implied by the standard account.

18. These five criteria come from Stockdale (2019).

19. Consider Segal and Textor's discussion of the two mountaineers who are halfway through a difficult trek. At this point, both still desire to reach the top and believe that such a feat is still possible, despite the treacherous conditions. However, only one of them is hopeful, which Segal and Textor take to be the additional factor that motivates him to continue. Given that the other mountaineer lacks hope (i.e., is not hopeful), he gives up and returns to base camp (Segal and Textor 2015).

REFERENCES

Blöser, Claudia. 2019. "Hope as an Irreducible Concept," *Ratio*, DOI: 10.1111/rati.12236, pp. 1–10.

Bovens, Luc. 1999. "The Value of Hope," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 59, no. 3, pp. 667–681.

Kadlac, Adam. 2017. "Hope(s) and Hopefulness," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 54, no. 3, pp 209–222.
Kwong, Jack M. C. 2019. "What is Hope?" *European Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 27, no. 1, pp. 243–254.
Kwong, Jack. M. C. 2020. "Hope and Hopefulness," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 50, no. 7, pp. 832–843.
Kwong, Jack. M. C. 2022. "How to Theorize about Hope," *European Journal of Philosophy*, DOI: 10.1111/ejop.12757, pp. 1–14.
Martin, Adrienne. 2015. *How We Hope* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).
McGeer, Victoria. 2004. "The Art of Good Hope," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, vol. 592, pp. 100–127.
Meirav, Ariel. 2009. "The Nature of Hope," *Ratio*, vol. 22, no. 2, pp. 216–233.
Milona, Michael, and Katie Stockdale. 2018. "A Perceptual Theory of Hope," *Ergo*, vol. 5, no. 8, pp. 203–222.
Nagel, Thomas. 1974. "What is it Like to be a Bat?" *Philosophical Review*, vol. 83, pp. 435–450.
Paul, L. A. 2014. *Transformative Experience* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press).
Pettit, Philip. 2004. "Hope and Its Place in Mind," *Annals of the American Academy*, vol. 592, pp. 152–165.
Segal, Gabriel, and M. Textor. 2015. "Hope as a Primitive Mental State," *Ratio*, vol. 28, pp. 207–222.
Shade, Patrick. 2001. *Habits of Hope* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press).
Stockdale, Katie. 2019. "Emotional Hope," in *The Moral Psychology of Hope*, ed. Claudia Blöser and Titus Stahl (London: Rowman and Littlefield), pp. 115–134.
Walker, Margaret Urban. 2006. *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations after Wrongdoing* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press).