

Discovering the Virtue of Hope

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Abstract: This paper asks whether there is a moral virtue of hope, and if so, what it is. The enterprise is motivated by a historical asymmetry, namely that while Christian thinkers have long classed hope as a theological virtue, it has not traditionally been classed as a moral one. But this is puzzling, for hoping well is not confined to the sphere of religion; and consequently we might expect that if the theological virtue is structurally sound, there will be a secular, moral analogue. This paper proposes that there is such an analogue, and that it is closely linked to the everyday notion of “having your priorities straight,” a phenomenon which is naturally understood in terms of the attitude of hope. It turns out that the priorities model provides an abstract way of characterizing a central but underexplored virtue, one which can be developed in secular or theological ways.

1 Introduction

Is there a virtue of hope, and if so, what is it? The history of theorizing about hope presents a puzzling picture. According to the Christian tradition, hope is one of the central theological virtues alongside faith and charity. It is theological most obviously because of its orientation to the divine; the virtuous hoper seeks salvation and friendship with God.¹ But hope isn't confined to religion. Atheists hope, too, and theists have plenty of earthly hopes. Some of these hopes are morally good (e.g., to be an excellent parent), while others are morally bad (e.g., to be an excellent thief). Yet hope does not appear on traditional lists of the moral virtues. Josef Pieper, a major 20th century Catholic thinker, goes so far as to say, “It would never occur to a philosopher unless he were also a Christian theologian, to describe hope as a virtue. For hope is either a theological virtue or not a virtue at all” (1997, 99).² Yet this historical asymmetry between the moral and the theological is puzzling, for if hoping well with respect to the divine is governed by a virtue of hope, then so too, we might think, should hoping well with respect to earthly projects. At first glance, it seems that either hope should be both a theological and moral virtue, or neither. This paper develops the former picture, offering a theory of hope as a moral virtue.

The paper begins by criticizing some recent attempts to make sense of a moral virtue of hope (henceforth I drop the qualifier ‘moral’ unless needed for clarity). One approach fails because it collapses the distinction between emotions and virtues (see Kadlac, 2015; cf. Bobier, 2018), and the other fails because it relies on a false theory of the attitude of hope (see Martin, 2014). I present an alternative picture of the attitude of hope, one according to which this attitude is an emotion. Thus, on the view defended here, any *virtue* of hope would need to be separate from the *attitude* of hope, since the latter is an emotion and virtues perfect emotions. Yet it may be that hope is regulated by some other, familiar virtue(s), and thus there is no point in positing a distinctive virtue of hope. I consider several possible candidates. As it happens, though, there are paradigm instances of hoping well that cannot be accounted for by familiar virtues.³ These are the hopes that are at the center of (or at least in very close vicinity to) the phenomenon denoted by the everyday expression, “having your priorities straight.” The discussion of having your priorities straight provides an intuitive vantage point from which to identify the virtue of hope.⁴ I call this the *priorities model*.

The paper closes with a brief return to the theological virtue of hope. I propose that one attractive way to characterize the theological virtue is as a fleshing out of the priorities model. Such a characterization is suited to unravel the historical asymmetry with which we began: the Christian tradition has identified a crucially important virtue that secular ethicists have missed, but the virtue is not essentially theological.

2 The Identity Model

The simplest picture of hope as a virtue is the *identity model*. This view says that the *attitude* of hope can be a virtue. By “attitude,” I mean whatever it is ‘hope’ refers to when we say things such as, “I hope they get the job” or “I hope it doesn’t rain tomorrow.” Much of the recent literature on hope has focused on analyzing hope as an attitude. Analyses typically begin with what Ariel Meirav (2009, 217) labels the *standard account*. According to this view, hoping that p consists of two elements: a desire that p and a probability assignment (typically understood as a belief) between 0 and 1 to p . After all, we do not hope for what we don’t want, and we don’t hope for what we know will, or won’t, happen. But most

philosophers today argue the standard account of hope is mistaken, or at least insufficient to capture *all* hopes (e.g., Pettit, 2004; Meirav, 2009; Martin, 2014). And in any case, those who adopt the identity model of hope as a virtue do not maintain that just any old hope in the standard sense counts as a virtue.

Adam Kadlac (2015) distinguishes between hopes in which a person is deeply invested and those in which they aren't. For example, a person going to a restaurant may hope it serves beer, but this "idle" hope has a negligible impact on their feeling and behavior. By contrast, a person who hopes that they get a job at the museum may organize much of their life around this hope, including going to graduate school and taking out loans to do so. Kadlac mentions Philip Pettit's (2004) notion of *substantial* hope. On Pettit's view, substantial hopes go beyond desire plus belief; an agent who substantially hopes that *p* resolves to act as if what they desire will, or is likely to, come about, even if they don't believe it is likely. Another important feature of hopes that may be virtues, Kadlac maintains, is that they are long-lasting. A temporary fixation on winning the lottery isn't plausibly a virtue, even if it has a momentarily profound effect on my behavior (2015, 341). In general, then, hopes which are virtues must be substantial, however we ultimately understand 'substantial' (Kadlac also mentions Trudy Govier's (2011) slightly different model of substantial hope).

Kadlac's argument for why substantial hopes can be virtues is straightforward. At the outset, he remarks, "I examine some of the ways in which hope can be valuable and how it can therefore make sense to speak of hope as a genuine virtue" (2015, 338). For example, those who hope in a serious way for something open themselves up to disappointment and pain, and this hopeful risk taking promotes courageous action (Kadlac 2015, 346-348). Hope thus supports the virtue of courage. Kadlac speculates that this connection with courage is why we often praise those who hope for ends that are difficult to achieve. He identifies other ways in which hope is valuable, too, namely that it promotes solidarity with those who share our hopes and that it promotes a more realistic picture of the world than optimism or pessimism. The claim, then, is that because hope is valuable in these ways, it is therefore a virtue.

The trouble with Kadlac's argument is that it seems to mistakenly slide from thoughts about the value of hope as an emotion to the conclusion that hope is a virtue. Consider Aristotle's observations about hope in the *Rhetoric*. Like Kadlac, Aristotle maintains that hope supports courage. It does so by supporting confidence that we will overcome obstacles (1389a26-8). But he did not conclude from this that hope is a virtue, for Aristotle rightly distinguishes emotions from the virtues that regulate them. Chris Bobier (2018) has already described (at length) this apparent flaw in Kadlac's argument, though with reference primarily to Aquinas. But if this point is a familiar one from the history of philosophy, how might the discussion of hope as a virtue have gotten off track in this way? The error may arise from the way in which we often talk of *virtuous hoping*, a turn of phrase Kadlac often uses. But the presence of virtuous hoping doesn't imply a virtue of hope, which is what Kadlac's paper (including its title, "The Virtue of Hope") promises. This is because virtuous hoping may be the product of other, familiar virtues.

But Kadlac may insist that this line of objection is mistakenly assuming that hope (or at least substantial hope) is an emotion. For if Kadlac were to deny that hope is an emotion, then he obviously wouldn't make the mistake of conflating emotions with virtues.

Adrienne Martin (2014) provides the resources for carrying out such a defense of the identity model. Martin, similar to Kadlac, emphasizes the power of hope to sustain us through difficult trials. As she puts it, "Life presents us with trials, and living well requires coping with them. If hope helps one find a way to live well by either overcoming or living within the constraints of her trial, then in this sense it is a virtue" (2014, 73). But Martin analyses hope in a way that treats it as something more complex than a simple emotion, and thus she isn't at risk of conflating emotion and virtue. According to her, hope is a "syndrome," meaning that it is not susceptible to a traditional philosophical analysis into necessary and sufficient conditions. Instead, a syndrome analysis of hope aims to identify "what element unifies hope as a syndrome of feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and motives" (Martin, 2014, 7).

Martin calls her theory the *incorporation analysis* (see also Moellendorf (2006, 422) for an early statement of a theory of hope along these lines). Hoping that *p* always involves a desire that *p* and a belief that *p* is possible. But hope in the fullest sense requires two

additional features. First, the hoper must take their belief to *license* (roughly, not rule out) doing hopeful activities such as planning or fantasizing. Second, the hoper must take their desire, and the desirable features of what they hope for, to give them reasons to engage in such hopeful activities.⁵ As a syndrome, however, hope is not reducible to these four elements (i.e., desire, belief, licensing, reason-giving), but they are the elements that unify hoping that *p* in the fullest sense. If hope really involves these four elements, along with other activities such as planning and fantasizing, then it may be that hope is robust enough to count as a virtue.

3 What is Hope?

I have argued elsewhere against the incorporation analysis of hope (Milona, 2019). Here I briefly summarize the objection. The trouble, as I see it, is that Martin's account builds too much into the nature of hope. An agent can hope *in the fullest sense* without adopting a licensing stance toward their probability assignment, and they can likewise hope in the fullest sense without taking their desire, or the features of the desired outcome, to give them reasons to engage in hopeful activities such as planning and fantasizing.

The easiest way to see this is to compare hope with other emotions. Although there is a question of whether hope should literally count as an emotion, it has long been classed alongside paradigm emotions such as fear, anger, etc. (D'Arms & Jacobson, 2000; de Sousa, 1987; Deigh, 2004; Goldie, 2004; Gordon, 1987; Nussbaum, 2004; Roberts, 2003). The observation about emotions that I want to emphasize here is that they can be *recalcitrant*. Recalcitrant emotions are those a person experiences in the face of a conflicting evaluative judgment. For instance, a person who fears flying on a plane may nevertheless judge that flying is safe. But it does not follow that they thereby fear in a lesser sense.

Hopes can also be recalcitrant. For instance, Luc Bovens describes a person who attends a car race and hopes to see a spectacular crash. This leads them to look for a spot to sit where they are likely to have the best view of crash, should one occur. Once they realize that they're hoping in this way, they feel ashamed, believing their hope to be utterly inappropriate (1999, 679). They do not actually believe, for instance, that they have reason to sit where they're likely to have the best view of a crash. Other hopes can be recalcitrant

in ways more akin to the recalcitrant fear of flying. The fear of flying is naturally understood as rooted in a feeling that a crash is much more likely than the agent believes it to be. This feeling fans the agent's fear of flying even while they believe it should not. Similarly, an intense hope that a scratch-off ticket called "Lucky 8s" leads to a massive payout may be rooted in a feeling that one is much more likely to win big than one actually believes, e.g., because one has had a long-history of good luck with the number eight.

The general point, then, is that just as we do not fear less simply by judging our fear to be misguided, we do not hope less simply by judging our hope to be misguided. Hopes and fears are one thing; judgments about their merits are another. Thus *incorporation* (into rational agency) doesn't appear to be an essential feature of hope. This comparison between hope and other emotions also suggests that hopeful activities – plans, fantasies, etc. – that we may pursue on the basis of our hopes are also separate from hope itself. For while we may do all sorts of things on the basis of our emotions, such activities are not generally taken to be part of the emotion itself.

But what *is* hope? I have defended a theory of hope elsewhere, and only briefly introduce it here (Milona and Stockdale, 2018; Milona, 2019). In my view, hoping that *p* involves a sense that *p* is possible and a desire that *p*. I also agree with Martin (and Moellendorf, 2006, 222) that hope involves some kind of positive normative assessment. This is best captured as a *perception* of reasons to pursue the desired outcome. In recent years, philosophers have been drawn to perceptual models of the emotions. This is in large part because perception, similar to emotion, can be recalcitrant (see Tappolet, 2012). A person may perceptually experience the world as being a way that they do not believe it to be. This may be because they are experiencing some familiar illusion (e.g., the Müller-Lyer illusion), or it may be that they know that their faculties have become corrupted (e.g., a person who knows that their lingering racist attitudes lead them to see cell phones as weapons in certain contexts). Returning to hope and Boven's car racing example, then, the person who recalcitrantly hopes in that scenario *experiences* reasons (e.g., that a wreck would cause a fiery explosion) to position themselves for the best view of a potential crash, but they don't *believe* there really are such reasons. In my view, desires are themselves a way of experiencing reasons (see also Scanlon, 1998; Schroeder, 2007), and so this picture doesn't

require moving beyond the standard model. But I don't ultimately insist on this view of desire here. If one doesn't subscribe to this view, the perceptual experience of reasons can be treated as a third criteria of hope alongside the desire and sense of possibility.⁶

Another key point, gestured at above, is that I reject the view that hope requires a full-fledged *belief* about the probability of the hoped-for outcome. In my view, a person can non-doxastically represent an outcome as more probable than they believe it to be, which can in turn lead them to hope more than they believe they should.⁷ This is what seems to be happening with hope in the lottery ticket case above ("Lucky 8s"): the person's sense that they are likely to win persists despite their belief that they almost certainly won't.⁸ In many cases, such non-doxastic orientations toward the future will be habitual, rooted in past experiences (e.g., having been lucky with a certain number). While I cannot defend this view in full here (but see Milona (ms.) for a sustained defense of hope without belief and see Gendler (2008) for a general discussion of belief-like states bound up with affect and motivation), it may bear on whether there is a distinctive virtue of hope. For if hope essentially involves a belief, then hope may be better viewed as governed at least partly by wisdom rather than a virtue worth calling "hope." This is an issue to which I return below.

The key takeaways here are that hope appears to be an emotion, or something in the vicinity, and a perceptual theory of hope allows us to pair hope as an emotion with Martin's idea that hope involves a normative assessment. But if hope is an emotion, or nearly so, then a hope that *p* isn't ever going to be a virtue. The virtue of hope, if it exists, must be something else. The identity model should be rejected.

4 An Easy Solution?

It may seem as if there is a straightforward fix to the problems with the identity model. To see why, it will be helpful to have in place a more precise statement of what a virtue is. Put abstractly, virtues are excellent traits of character. What makes certain traits of character excellent principally has to do with how they lead us to feel and act. Here is Linda Zagzebski's account:

A *virtue* is a deep and enduring acquired trait that we admire upon reflection, consisting of a disposition to have a certain emotion that initiates and directs action towards an end, and reliable success in reaching that end. (2017, 113)

One clarification worth adding is that virtues appear to be *complex* dispositions, or *clusters* of dispositions (see Curzer, 2012, 22). For example, the virtue of courage regulates fear, and doing this properly requires dispositions to act, think, and feel in certain ways in situations of danger. Going forward, I assume Zagzebski's basic definition, qualified to allow that virtues may not be a single disposition. I am also noncommittal about whether virtue requires "reliable success." This is a general question about what is required for any virtue that we needn't settle here.

Now consider what I take to be an uncontroversial observation, namely that we can hope well or poorly. One person might hope for entirely the wrong thing (e.g., to join the Mafia), whereas another might hope for something perfectly fine but in the wrong way (e.g., an overblown hope to defeat one's friends at a game of Monopoly). Given that we can hope well or poorly, it can seem as if we have a good reason to invoke a virtue that regulates hope. The straightforward solution to the problems with Kadlac's and Martin's proposals, then, is to call whatever virtue regulates hope *the virtue of hope*. It is the excellent trait of character that leads us to hope for the right things, in the right way, and at the right time.⁹

Bobier (2018) argues against such a picture. He observes that we hope for a wide array of things in a wide array of contexts. I may hope that my grant proposal is successful, or that a friend remembers my birthday, or that there be world peace. These are all dramatically different, though in each instance, depending on the details of how I hope and why, I may be said to hope well. But it is a feature of virtues that they govern emotions in some paradigmatic context. For example, courage is, as Bobier puts it, "the virtuous disposition regulating fear and confidence in dangerous situations" (2018, 230). And likewise, "Temperance is the virtuous disposition regulating our desires for bodily pleasure, especially food and sex" (2018, 230). Nothing similar goes for hope, Bobier contends. There is no sphere of life for hope, and thus it is counterintuitive to include hope as a virtue alongside courage, temperance, and other familiar virtues.

In response to this objection, a defender of hope as a virtue may argue that the virtue of hope shouldn't be taken to regulate *all* hopes. It may have only to do with hoping in some circumscribed context. Consider some candidates. Parents, for instance, should have hopes with respect to their children. Broadly speaking, they should hope that their children's lives go well, but they should also have more specific hopes that are tailored to the situation, talents, and desires of their children. Some parents, unfortunately, hope poorly with regard to their children, e.g., a parent who ardently hopes that their child becomes a professional athlete despite the fact that the child has no such desires and loves reading and writing above all else. We might call the character trait that disposes a parent to hope well the *virtue of parental hope*. Consider another possibility. Nancy Snow (2018) proposes a *political* virtue of hope, one which has principally to do with hope in the context of a democratic system (see also Moellendorf, 2006). According to Snow, "Hope as a democratic civic virtue is the entrenched disposition of openness to the political possibilities a democratic government can provide" (2018, 419). There is more to her picture, but the key for our purposes is the implicit methodology: identify an attitudinal hope which is good to have, and then point to the underlying disposition as a virtue of hope. Narrow views of this sort appear to solve Bobier's problem, for in each of these cases there is a paradigmatic context of hoping well.

I am hesitant to adopt this strategy, or at least to rest content with it. This is because it would lead to a *flood* of virtues. For any context in which we hope well, we can define a virtue for that context. And for that matter, we could apparently do the same thing for any other emotion. We would need a good justification for expanding the list of virtues in such an unprecedented way. When we are inclined to posit some new virtue, the question we ought to ask first is whether there is some other familiar virtue that does the work of the more specific virtue (cf. Bobier, 2018, 226-231). As a comparison, consider that we could posit a variety of virtues regulating confidence and fear, one for each highly specific context in which we can do this well. But there's no need to do this: we have the virtue of courage which covers all such cases.¹⁰ Now it may be that some individual is only courageous in some narrower way. In this case, we can simply say as much, namely that they lack courage generally but are courageous when it comes, say, to asking people that they are attracted to

out on dates. This possibility may be explained by the fact that, as noted above, virtues seem to be a cluster of interconnected dispositions rather than a single virtue, and an individual may not have the set required for the full virtue.

In raising these points, I do not mean to argue that there is not anything like a democratic virtue of hope, a parental virtue of hope, etc. As will become clear, I think that in an important sense there are. This is because they exist as components of a more general virtue of hope, one which has yet to be isolated in the literature. In identifying this virtue, I also aim to articulate why the virtue of hope, and any of its subsidiaries, are not just instances of a more familiar virtue.

Before developing my favored conception of the virtue of hope, it is worth returning briefly to the theological virtue. As it happens, Bobier has no objection to the theological virtue, or at least Aquinas's version. On the surface, though, this seems puzzling, given what we have just observed. The theological virtue of hope appears to be a highly-specialized virtue, similar to the democratic, parental, etc. virtues of hope mentioned above. Consider Charles Pinches, quoting Aquinas on hope:

For the Christian, the theological virtue of hope is necessarily fixed on 'eternal life, which consists in the enjoyment of God Himself. For we should hope from Him for nothing less than Himself, since His goodness, whereby he imparts good things to his creatures, is no less than his essence.' (2014, 357; quotation from Aquinas's *ST*, II-II.17.2)

The theological virtue of hope is principally about hoping well for salvation. On one understanding of this virtue, it is a perfection of the emotion of hope, orienting it toward God (see Mittleman, 2009, 50-1; see also Lamb, 2018 on Augustine). If we agree that it is reasonable to posit such a virtue, then it is difficult to see why it would not also be reasonable to posit other versions of the virtue of hope (e.g., hoping in parenting or hoping in politics); or if we do not want to countenance other such virtues, perhaps because we think that they can be explained as the intersection of other familiar virtues, then it is not clear why we would countenance a theological virtue of hope, either. Strikingly, though, one common reading of Aquinas is that the theological hope is not a perfection of the emotion of hope. The virtue concerns an *act* of relying on God for something that we

cannot otherwise achieve. The emotion of hope, by contrast, aims at earthly goods which are within our power (see Miner, 2009; Lamb, 2016).

I will not have much to say about Aquinas's view here, other than to note that it draws some surprising boundaries between ways of hoping that we might not have expected. It is natural to suppose – at least to my mind and perhaps to others operating outside of Thomistic frameworks – that theological hope would somehow be a perfection of ordinary human hope. The model of hope as a virtue I propose will be pitched at an abstract enough level that those who wish to take it in a theological direction will be able. Indeed, as I will point out, it fits with much of how Augustine talks about hope.

5 The Priorities Model

5.1 “Getting Your Priorities Straight”

In seeking a virtue of hope, I begin by identifying the paradigmatic context, or sphere of life, in which a virtue of some sort operates. This first part of the discussion says nothing directly about hope; it identifies a plausible candidate for *a* virtue. I subsequently argue that this virtue is properly analyzed partly in terms of the emotion of hope, making it a plausible candidate for *the virtue of hope*.

To begin, consider the everyday idea of “getting your priorities straight.” The word ‘priority’ is comparative; it derives from the latin, *prioritas*, which means to come before in time, order, or rank (OED 1a, 1b). The sense of ‘priority’ that I focus on concerns something’s normative importance compared to some set of alternatives. For example, candidates for government office may debate about what kinds of goals or projects should take precedent over others. In the United States, a familiar debate centers on the importance of military spending and national defense, with Republicans largely being in favor of higher spending on defense than Democrats. The debate, in effect, is about what the *priorities* of the nation should be. We can also talk about priorities at the personal level. A person who has central life projects which make sense for them, and who balances these projects well, is said to *have their priorities straight*. By contrast, one whose projects are out of sorts *needs to get their priorities straight*.

It will be useful to work with an example. Consider Vincent, who has several priorities around which he organizes his life: parenthood, friendships, his career as a literature professor, his role as a citizen, and his hobby as a painter. This way of speaking might be taken as evidence that priorities are oriented to “things.” But priorities are better understood as being oriented to propositions, or sets of propositions. For example, Vincent’s prioritizing of friends is shorthand for something more concrete, e.g., he prioritizes *that* he finds new friends, *that* he cultivates his current friendships, etc. By contrast, a mobster who prioritizes friendship does so in a very different way. The idea that the object of a priority is really a proposition, and not just a thing, helps to avoid conflating Vincent’s and the mobster’s priorities (cf. Sinhababu, 2015 on propositionalism about desire). This point will become especially important below when we analyze what it means to prioritize something. For if priorities are analyzed (partly) in terms of hope, then the analysis will be more plausible to the extent that hope and priorities are oriented to the same kinds of objects.

A couple of additional points about priorities are worth flagging. The first is that they can be more precise or less precise. A vague understanding of one’s priorities often makes it difficult to know how to organize and plan one’s life, a point which is occasionally made in popular advice columns about how to get one’s priorities straight (see Ishak, 2016; Todd, 2017). But one can err in the other direction, too. For one may be so specific in their priorities that they become blind to wonderful opportunities. As it happens, we can assume, Vincent’s priorities are pitched at *just* the right degree of specificity (for him) to allow him to plan effectively while remaining flexible to unexpected ways in which he may be able to pursue his priorities.

A second point about priorities is that they can be evaluated for how well-organized they are. In Vincent’s case, he doesn’t prioritize his academic career over his child’s welfare and education, nor does he put his painting hobby above his academic career. What this means more specifically is that he tends to apportion the appropriate amount of time to these activities, according to their relative importance, and he focuses on these activities in the right way when he is pursuing them. One way for his priorities to be out of sorts, for instance, would be for him to regularly stay late at the office rather than spend time with

his child. Another way would be to habitually think about work, or to feel anxious about work, when he spends time with his child. Fortunately, however, Vincent habitually pursues the right priority at the right time, and only rarely has his attention elsewhere when he does so.

Vincent has *some* virtue, which we loosely pick out with the phrase “having one’s priorities straight.” What is the paradigmatic context for exercising this virtue? It arises most prominently at the points at which we decide what to do with our time.¹¹ Suppose that Vincent is working late at the office, trying to finish a draft of a paper to send off for publication. But he knows that it is opening night for his son’s school play in which he has a lead role. Vincent hasn’t *promised* to go, and his son would understand if he didn’t. Nevertheless, it would also be a meaningful show of support for him to come, given how hard his kid has worked. The choice he makes in this scenario reflects something about Vincent’s priorities. The way in which Vincent makes the choice also does, if he finds himself choosing to go out of a genuine wish to support his son as opposed to choosing to go to avoid an argument with his spouse, who strongly recommends that he go. In this way, there are paradigmatic choice points for “having one’s priorities straight” just as there are for courage or temperance. The hypothesis, then, is that there is some virtue which guides us at these moments, and the aim now is to determine what it is.

5.2 Priorities and Hope

I analyze what it is to have your priorities straight principally in terms of a single emotion, hope. Some will have quibbles with the analysis, of course. Having your priorities straight is an everyday notion that is difficult to pin down. But such quibbles should not distract us from the ultimate goal, which is to use the ordinary notion of having your priorities straight as a tool to help identify a virtue worth calling ‘the virtue of hope’. So while I believe that the *priorities model* of the virtue of hope, as I call it, captures the heart of what it is to have your priorities straight, readers who disagree are free to, as it were, “kick away the ladder.” Having described this virtue, I thereafter argue that this virtue is arguably an abstract way of thinking about the Christian virtue of hope, which lends additional support to the idea that this virtue does indeed deserve to be called ‘the virtue of hope’.

The proposal that priorities should be analyzed in terms of hope fits well with the objects of hope. As we have seen, priorities are oriented to propositions. To prioritize something, say, family, ultimately means something more specific, e.g., that one spends weekends doing family activities, that one is kind to family members, and so on. Likewise, it is taken for granted in the hope literature that hope is a propositional attitude. One hopes that p . For instance, one hopes that they win the race, or that they find love, or whatever (see the theories of hope discussed in Martin (2014, 17-25)).¹² To say that a person prioritizes family, friends, work, and hobbies is to say that they have a cluster of powerful hopes centering on each of these domains, and then they act accordingly. Recall that, according to my account, hoping that p consists in a desire that p which responds to the belief that p is possible, and a perceptual-like experience of reasons to promote p . The perception, according to my view, is identified with the desire. In prioritizing his children over work, for instance, Vincent recognizes the possibility of meaningful time with his children if he sets aside work temporarily, and this leads him to (desideratively) experience weightier reasons to spend time with his child than to continue working.

In general, a person whose priorities are straight has their central hopes toward the right ends, has them ordered appropriately, and then acts on the basis of those hopes.¹³ Each of these notions – ‘central hopes’, ‘right ends’, and ‘ordered appropriately’ – require some explanation. Our central hopes are those which partly constitute our major life projects (by virtue of their *strength*, which I define below) rather than fleeting projects (e.g., a person who decides to cook one afternoon but that otherwise doesn’t have cooking as a hobby).¹⁴ One way in which our priorities can fail to be straight is if we hope for the wrong things. Consider a person with a deep and enduring hope to become a lawyer but who, for whatever reason, should not so hope. Such a person’s priorities are certainly out of sorts if they act on this hope. But they’re also out of sorts if they resist their hope to become a lawyer. In that case, they may act as a virtuous person would act, but they would be *continent* rather than genuinely virtuous. According to Aristotle, the continent person does what the virtuous person does but in doing so they resist internal psychological pressure to do otherwise (see Aristotle, *NE IV*). The person who truly prioritizes the right things should not typically experience this dissonance.¹⁵

Consider now what it means for our (central) hopes to be ordered, which helps to explain what it means for our priorities to be ordered. The ordering of our hopes is a function of the relative strengths of the underlying hope-constituting desires (or, rather, dispositions to have desires of certain strengths). Strength here is multidimensional; it is a function of the desires' relative influence on attention, motivation, feeling, and recognition of reasons (including the weights of those reasons).¹⁶ A person may hope for what they ought to, but their hope is *too strong* compared to other hopes. Imagine a person whose hopes centering on success at work influence their motivation, attention, feeling, and experience of reasons in a persistent and powerful way. The person's hopes centering on their child are comparatively weaker, even in circumstances that they clearly ought to be focused on their child. This is a person whose priorities are not straight in that their priorities are not ordered in the right way. In my view, it is the experience of reasons which is at the core. To describe the feeling of a desire is in large part to describe the experience of certain reasons (similar to how a description of a perception inevitably refers to what perception is an experience of); and the weights of the reasons one experiences tends to exert a corresponding influence on one's motivation and attention, even independently of what one *believes* about the weights of those reasons (cf. Roberts (2013, 72) and Horgan and Timmons (2017) on affect). But one need not agree that the experience of reasons is the central node in desiderative strength to otherwise agree with the priorities model of the virtue of hope that I am proposing.

The priorities model advances our understanding of recent proposals that hope is a political/democratic virtue (Moellendorf, 2006; Snow, 2018). As we observed above, the methodology that leads to these proposals seems as if it will generate an explosion of virtues of hope, which are connected only in that they concern hope. But the priorities model provides a more general theoretical framework in which to embed and vindicate specific ways of hoping virtuously in political, parental, etc. contexts. Such pursuits are priorities people ought to have and which should be balanced appropriately relative to their other priorities. To understand whether, say, an agent's political hopes are fully virtuous depends not only whether such hopes (or hopeful dispositions) seem virtuous in

isolation, but also on how they are situated with the context of the agent's life as a whole, and principally with respect to their other hopes.

5.3 The Priorities Account and Familiar Virtues

In the *Protagoras*, Socrates famously argued that exercises of courage, temperance, etc. were really just exercises of wisdom. While this is an extreme view, questions about how to carve up the space of virtues are notoriously complex. Against a long history of debate, I cannot expect to make a compelling argument that the priorities model of hope *cannot* be theorized as a subsidiary of some other virtue. But even if it were, this would hardly undermine the project. Virtues which are aspects of other virtues may be *important* aspects, worth identifying and understanding.

However, we can begin to think about the place of hope in a broader account of virtue by noticing why it isn't easily subsumed under another virtue.¹⁷ To begin, the virtue of hope is not temperance. According to Aristotle, temperance is concerned with the bodily pleasures, especially from eating, drinking, and sex (see *NE*, III.10-12). In general, the sphere of temperance appears to be *bodily pleasure*, or perhaps more generally, *pleasure*. But the sphere of having your priorities straight is not that of pleasure. Whether Vincent stays late at work or goes to the school play, for instance, may have nothing to do with pleasure, for he may expect to feel the same quantity of pleasure either way. Yet such situations are a paradigm context for the virtue of having one's priorities straight.

Similarly, the virtue of hope is not the same as courage. When Vincent makes the correct decision to pause his painting project to grade student papers, he isn't acting courageously. According to Aristotle, courage is displayed when there is a threat of bodily harm, notably, but not exclusively, in the context of warfare (see *NE*, 1115a24-30; 1117a23-3). But even if we allow courage's sphere to be dangerous situations more generally, as Socrates does in Plato's *Laches* (191d), it still won't turn out that having your priorities straight is a form of courage. When Vincent makes the correct decision to pause his painting project to grade papers, for instance, he isn't afraid of anything. Or if we can locate fear in such situations, it is likely to be weak and not a principal factor in the choice of what to do.

None of what I have said about temperance or courage should be taken to mean that they are wholly disconnected from the priorities model. For example, being overwhelmed by bodily pleasure may cause a person to act in a way that is contrary to how they would act if their central hopes were ordered properly. But this is a familiar type of interaction among virtues. A failure of temperance may also lead one to act in ways that are contrary to courage. But temperance and courage are nevertheless distinct.

More puzzling, perhaps, is the relationship between the priorities model and practical wisdom. This can be clarified by noticing that practical wisdom relates to the priorities model in the same way as it relates to courage, temperance, etc. To begin, consider Aristotle's distinction between *natural* and *proper* virtue. On one way of understanding this distinction, a person with the natural virtue of, say, courage, has developed habits of acting in characteristically courageous ways and generally knows which acts are courageous. But in lacking proper virtue, they do not understand *why* certain acts are courageous. According to Curzer (2012, 300-1), proper virtues are moral virtues infused with practical wisdom. The priorities model patterns in the same way. An agent whose central ("priority-constituting") hopes are ordered in the right way and who acts accordingly may nevertheless lack an understanding of *why* certain of their central life-projects deserve priority over others. They may also struggle to weight their priorities appropriately in cases that are especially complex.¹⁸ Such a person has the natural version of the priorities model but not the proper version. But the fact that there can be such a person indicates that the priorities model includes practical wisdom as a part only to the extent that other moral virtues do, too.

However, the very nature of hope might be thought to present an additional complication. Consider that contemporary theorists of hope almost invariably maintain that hope is partly constituted by a *belief* about the probability of the hoped-for outcome. And if hope involves belief, then it might appear to be the province of intellectual rather than moral virtue. Or, if there is a virtue of hope, it might appear to be a peculiar combination of intellectual and moral virtue, one which might better be treated as two distinct virtues. As Chris Bobier puts it:

Since there are two ways passionate hope can fail to be virtuous, this suggests that the passion of hope needs to be virtuously regulated along two separate dimensions. We need to be disposed to accurately identify what is possible and to what degree, and we need to be disposed to desire the right sort of objects to the right degree...Calling a disposition 'the virtue of hope' misleadingly suggests that there is one virtuous disposition that regulates our passion of hope, which is not the case. (2018, 15)

In response to this challenge, one may point out that there is precedence in Aristotle for a combinatory virtue. Aristotle defines the virtue of *megalopsychia* as a combination of greatness and self-knowledge (*NE*, IV.3). And one can be great without self-knowledge (e.g., a humble person), and one can have self-knowledge without greatness (Curzer, 2012, 132). So perhaps the virtue of hope is a combinatory virtue, one which straddles the moral/intellectual divide.

I am not inclined to treat hope as a combinatory virtue in the manner of *megalopsychia*.¹⁹ This is not simply because Aristotle himself may have been wrong to posit such a virtue (Curzer, 2012, 132-1). Rather, it is because I doubt that hope requires a belief. As indicated above, and as I have argued in detail elsewhere (Milona, ms.), habit often leads us to experience certain outcomes as likely that we do not believe are likely, and vice-versa. For instance, good fortune in the past with the number eight may tempt a person to buy a scratch-off called "Lucky 8s" for they feel as if they are likely to win big if they do. They may feel this way even in the face of an all-things-considered belief about the likelihood of winning. In this way, hope is akin to other emotions such as fear. A person may feel as if they are likely to fall if they walk onto the Grand Canyon Skywalk, even though they believe it is perfectly safe (Gendler, 2008). According to the priorities model, then, the virtue of hope stands in a similar relation to wisdom as does courage. We need to bring hope/fear into alignment with reason, but this is accomplished through training and habit to foster the right dispositions (cf. 1103b21-5;1103a14-17).

6 Christian Hope and the Priorities Model

This section briefly explores the possibility that the Christian virtue of hope may not be distinct from the priorities model; the priorities model may be a more abstract

characterization of the same virtue. If this is so, there are excellent grounds for labeling the priorities model ‘the virtue of hope’.

The prospects for linking the priorities model and Christian hope may be bleak on one conception of the latter. As noted above, the standard interpretation of Aquinas is that the virtue of hope is not a perfection of the emotion (or passion) of hope. According to Aquinas, hope as a virtue concerns an *act*, namely that of relying on God for salvation. The attitude of hope, by contrast, is an emotion, and is oriented to earthly objects that we take to be within our power. Now it’s worth noting that the priorities model also concerns acts, for an agent cannot rightly be said to have their priorities straight unless they act in accordance with their rightly oriented hopes. This suggests that there may be a way to merge the priorities model with certain Thomistic ideas about the virtue of hope, but I will not pursue this delicate exercise here. For now, I simply table the issue, conceding that a Thomist may not be on board with the idea that the priorities model is a more abstract characterization of the Christian virtue of hope.

But consider St. Augustine. According to Michael Lamb (2018), Augustine offers a theory of rightly ordered *love* which points to an implicit theory of rightly ordered *hope*, one which arguably fits the priorities model. To begin, consider Augustine’s account of an order of love, which he describes as follows:

We have been commanded to love one another [John 13: 34; 15:12, 17], but the question is whether one person should be loved by another on his own account or for some other reason. If on his own account, we enjoy him; if for some other reason, we use him. In my opinion he should be loved for another reason. For if something is to be loved on its own account, it is made to constitute the happy life, even if it is not as yet the reality but the hope of it which consoles us at the time. (*On Christian Teaching*, 1.22.20)

Some scholars interpret Augustine as saying that we should not love our neighbor for their own sake; our attitude toward them should rather be instrumental. But this reading arguably puts a Kantian spin on “use,” and isn’t what Augustine has in mind (see Gregory, 2008, 335-350; Lamb, 2018). It is more plausible that there is no question of whether to love our neighbors for their own sake *or* God for His own sake. We should love both for

their own sake. But in loving our neighbors for their own sake, we should do so in a way that recognizes them as participating in the goodness of God. They participate in the goodness of God because they are created by God. Augustine laments that people lose sight of this, coming to love the world in a way that is isolated from God. In the *City of God*, for instance, he doesn't criticize the miser because he loves gold; he criticizes the inordinate way in which he does. He says that "a brief and true definition of virtue is 'rightly ordered love'" (15.22).

Lamb (2018) argues that Augustine also has an implicit account of rightly ordered hope, analogous to his account of rightly ordered love. Indeed, Augustine is committed to such a theory because hope is itself a form of love, one which is oriented to future, possible goods (see *Enchiridion*, 2.8). We should have earthly hopes, but we should not "set our heart's joy on them, in case when they collapse we should be buried in the ruins." He continues, "we make use of this world as though we were not using it, in order to reach the one who made this world, and remain in him, enjoying his eternity" (Sermon 157). The idea, then, is that we should have earthly hopes, but those earthly hopes must relate in the right way to an eternal hope for salvation. As Lamb (2018, 1042) puts it, hopes for genuine good worldly ends "can be a proximate part of realizing the ultimate end."

It's important to note that, for Augustine, religious and earthly hope are not different types of mental state, however much their content may differ. The virtue of hope is a perfection of the emotion of hope. And, at least on the surface, this virtue looks very much like the priorities model, albeit with a Christian understanding of what it means to have your priorities straight. On an Augustinian approach, it is natural to think that a person hoping can go wrong in broadly two ways. First, and most obviously, the person may hope for the wrong things. This can happen if a person hopes for what they should not hope for at all, e.g., that they become a good thief, but it can also happen if they hope for something wonderful, e.g., that racial justice is achieved, but fail to do so in a way that refers in the right way to God and the ultimate hope for salvation.²⁰ But even if a person's hopes generally have the right content, they may be of the wrong strength, exerting inordinate influence on the person's psyche. This may happen when one's hope for earthly friendships overshadows another hope for divine friendship. The crucial point, then, is

that Augustinians and secular ethicists may be able to agree, at a certain level of abstraction, about what the virtue of hope is. The dispute is about how to flesh out the virtue in the details. A secular ethicist, for instance, may allow for a pluralistic picture of our central hopes whereby there is no supreme good to which all of our hopes must somehow refer. They may also be hesitant to put as many specific requirements on what agents *must* hope for, allowing for more diversity in how the virtue of hope may manifest from person to person.

The fact that Augustinian hope bears strong structural similarities to the priorities model indicates a deeper reason for characterizing the priorities model as *the virtue of hope*. In general, I suspect that Christians who do not wish to follow Aquinas in treating the virtue of hope as something other than a perfection of the emotion will want to follow Augustine's lead. As I have observed, it isn't attractive to think of Christian hope as the perfection of a *single* hope for salvation, for while such a hope may well be good, we do not want to posit a virtue for every good emotion. It is likely best to think of the virtue as having to do with the content and interplay of many of our central hopes.

7 Recap

I first argued that, for hope to be a moral virtue, it must be other than the attitude of hope. This is because, despite what some theorists have argued, hope is an emotion, and emotions cannot be virtues (see also Bobier, 2017). If there were a virtue of hope separate from the emotion, it would need to meet three criteria. First, it would need to principally concern the emotion of hope. Second, there would need to be some paradigmatic context in which the virtue is exercised. And, third, the virtue shouldn't simply be an (obvious) instance of a more familiar virtue. I have argued that careful reflection on the ordinary notion of "having your priorities straight" points to a virtue of hope. While some hopes are not part of having your priorities straight, some of our most central hopes are; and recognizing this provides a way of making precise the loose, everyday idea of having your priorities straight. And this virtue is plausibly a more abstract way of thinking about the religious virtue of hope, allowing for secular and theological versions of the same virtue.

Thus the historical tension with which we began, namely that hope is thought a theological virtue but never a secular one, is resolved in favor of allowing conceptual space for both.

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Endnotes

¹ Theological virtues are also thought to be achievable only by God's grace. See Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* (henceforth, *ST*) II-II.17.5.

² See also Aquinas *ST* III.62.3

³ Aquinas argues that magnanimity is the virtue which perfects hope. I don't attempt a detailed excavation of Aquinas's views, however. See n. 17 below for more detail.

⁴ Readers need not agree with me that having your priorities straight is the same as the virtue of hope. The former is an everyday expression that is likely to elude any precise analysis. For instance, the phrase risks suggesting a trait that is more conservative than I ultimately intend, and so in the end, I recommend using the ordinary phrase to help identify the virtue but do not insist on a strict identity.

⁵ Darrel Moellendorf was the first to defend a theory of hope along these lines. Here is how he puts it: "A person hopes for X if and only if (1) she non-confidently believes that X is possible, (2) she takes X as possessing normative significance, and (3) the combination of elements (1) and (2) are sufficient for her to incorporate the existence of X into her plans for acting" (2006, 422). For reasons that become clear below, I think that Moellendorf and Martin overintellectualize the attitude of hope.

⁶ For these two ways of developing the perceptual theory of hope, see Milona and Stockdale (2018, 211-12).

⁷ Andrew Chignell (2014, 102) also argues that hope doesn't require belief. According to him, although a person who hopes that *p* needn't believe that *p* is possible, he must "believe that *p* is possible if he were to form a belief on the matter" (102). In similar fashion, Blöser argues that hope *rules out*, but does not require, any specific beliefs (2019, 209). Unlike these views, the present proposal appeals to actual probability assessments in emotions like hope (as well as fear, dread, despair, etc.), but it then denies that these assessments must be beliefs.

⁸ In my view, this is analogous to a case in which a person fears flying on a plane (or riding a roller coaster, etc.) despite believing it to be safe. One might claim that in such cases the agent believes that flying on a plane is safe and also believes that flying on a plane is not safe. But this generates the result that the recalcitrantly fearful agent is incoherent in an extreme way that they don't appear to be. Better to treat fear as not requiring any beliefs about the likelihood of outcomes (cf. Naar, forthcoming; Milona, ms.).

⁹ One may wonder why I don't label the proposed virtue *hopefulness* (and a similar question emerges for my own proposal below). The reason has to do with the gap between hoping and being hopeful. Consider a person living under very difficult, oppressive conditions. They might "hope against hope" that the oppressive conditions will improve, but it seems misleading to describe them as *hopeful*. W. E. B. Dubois, for instance, once spoke of "a hope not hopeless but unhopeful" (1994, 98). Katie Stockdale (2018, 33) also talks about *fearful* hope, which seems not to involve the positivity of hopefulness. Thanks to a reviewer for pushing me to clarify this point.

¹⁰ It may seem as if we can explain the virtue of political hope largely as an instance of courage in the political context. To illustrate, consider that the recent history of democracy gives rise to fear and worry that democracy will not ultimately take us in a positive direction. In particular, the rise of extreme right-wing populist movements in America and Europe are cause for special concern (see Snow, 2018). But we also know that

democracies are valuable in a variety of ways and that they harbor great possibility. It thus makes sense to stand up in the face of such threats, given the potential payoffs. Hope can certainly be a useful psychological tool in this effort, but there's arguably no need for a separate virtue of hope beyond courage. Recall from above that Aristotle recognized a role for hope in supporting courage, but he did not create a separate virtue of hope.

¹¹ One might hear "get your priorities straight" as referring to practical wisdom in general. I compare the priorities model of hope and practical wisdom below.

¹² Ratcliffe (2013) argues that there is a form of hope which is non-intentional. But I am granting that the virtue of hope that I identify does not concern *all* hopes.

¹³ The virtue itself will of course be the complex disposition regulating these hopes and corresponding actions.

¹⁴ One might suppose that a person can have a major life project without hoping to work towards the fulfillment of that project. But I doubt that this is true. Consider that one intuitively counts as having a major life project (e.g., becoming a doctor) only insofar as they pursue the fulfillment of that project. And if one pursues some project without hope, then it seems that their central project is *really* something else (e.g., pleasing their parents). So while I do not go as far as Bobier (2017), who argues that all practical deliberation involves hope, I find it difficult to imagine the pursuit of central life projects (which always involve a measure of uncertainty) without hope. The analysis of having one's priorities straight further illustrates why it is attractive to analyze our central life projects partly in terms of hope.

¹⁵ Perhaps there are cases in which equally significant priorities conflict in a way that *should* create dissonance in the person whose priorities are straight precisely because their priorities are straight.

¹⁶ As noted above (sec. 3), readers who find it implausible that desires represent reasons can treat the experience of reasons element of hope as separate from the desire. They can then treat this experience as a separate dimension along which hopes can vary in strength.

¹⁷ Aquinas argues that magnanimity is the virtue which perfects hope (see Question ST II-II.129). But I haven't space to consider Aquinas's position here. For one, Aquinas's views are too complex and subtle to do justice to. For example, he distinguishes between different ways of hoping (namely, that which is implicated in the religious virtue of hope and that which is implicated in magnanimity), and this distinction is not present in contemporary (secular) theorizing about hope. For another, his notion of magnanimity brings with it significant conceptual baggage. As Aquinas says, 'magnanimity' "denotes stretching forth of the mind to great things." In addition to greatness, he also links this virtue to confidence, honor, and desert. Whether and how to translate Aquinas's views for the contemporary moment is a vexing question. While I would welcome a detailed study of Aquinas's virtue of magnanimity in light of recent theorizing about hope, I cannot offer that here.

¹⁸ Thanks to Jo Kornegay for helpful discussion on this point.

¹⁹ Contemporary philosophers who treat hope as a virtue are, however, pushed to do so. This is because almost all contemporary philosophers of hope take hope to essentially involve belief.

²⁰ I leave it to Augustinians and scholars of Augustine to fill in the details of the precise content here.

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