Hopeful Pessimism

The Kantian Mind at the End of All Things[1]

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1 KANT'S THIRD QUESTION

No casual reader of Kant will be surprised to learn, upon arriving at the Canon of Pure Reason chapter at the end of the first *Critique*, that "What can I know?" and "What should I do?" are two of the three questions driving his philosophical enterprise. It *is* surprising to learn, however, that the third and in some sense central question for Kant is "What may I hope [*Was darf ich hoffen*]?" (A806/B833). Kant wrote no *Critique* or *Metaphysical Foundations* of hope, and he makes little explicit effort even to say what hope is.[2] Compared to stalwarts like *Erkenntnis*, *Urteil*, and *Vernunft*, the word *Hoffnung* barely shows up at all in the critical philosophy—and many of those usages are by-the-by ("I hope to have shown. . .").

What Kant does say in this passage is that "What may I hope?" is a distinct question that also *unites* the other two, or acts as a bridge between their domains. The question about hope is "simultaneously practical and theoretical"—it "concerns happiness" and "finally comes down to the inference that something **is . . . because something ought to happen**" (A805–806/B833–834; original emphasis).

Here is one way to interpret this: For Kant, any correct answer to the question "What *ought* I do?" will take the form: *Act from subjective principles ("maxims") that you can reasonably will to be universal laws*.[3] But although adherence to the form is what makes the action right, the action will also have an *end*—we are trying to produce, obtain, or further some outcome. So when we perform the action, we also naturally *hope* that the end will be achieved through our own free efforts, or with the help of others. Such hope, in turn, implicitly commits us to the "real practical possibility"[4] of the end, and thus to the actual existence of any necessary means to the end (including, perhaps, our own freedom).

Here's an example. When someone (or at least someone of a Kantian mind) sends money to a charity in order to improve the lot of the poor, she is acting from duty: she thinks she *ought* to do this, no matter what, and that the maxim of her will could reasonably be universalized. But if she is like most of us, she also naturally hopes that the money *actually helps someone*. The rightness of the act is not tied to the accomplishment of the end, but the end is intended and hoped-for all the same. Such hope clearly presupposes that the end *can* be attained: that it is really, practically possible. And that in turn presupposes that other things actually *exist*. In the example, the hope that accompanies

the charitable act presupposes that it is really, practically possible to help the needy in this way. That in turn presupposes the *actual existence* of (a) the needy, (b) the charity, and (c) a causal path between the two such that the gift financially improves someone's lot. So hope regarding the outcome presupposes that the outcome is really, practically possible, and that in turn presupposes various existence claims. But existence claims, according to Kant, are in the domain of the theoretical.

So this is one way in which the third question operates as a bridge between the practical and the theoretical: we start by acting as we *ought*, we then hope for certain outcomes of those acts, and we ultimately affirm propositions about what *is*. If the hope in question is practically rational (remember, the question is about what we *dürfen*[5]), then the theoretical "is"-claim inherits a defeasible kind of moral justification. Such justification can be defeated in a number of ways. In the case of the charitable gift, the presuppositions are about empirical matters, and so the justification can be defeated by *evidence* that, say, the causal pathway does not in fact exist.

That's a complicated piece of reasoning, obviously. My goal is not to reconstruct it in detail here,[6] but rather to note that the steps involving hope turn out to be inessential, at least if we are inclined (as the Kantian mind clearly is) to some version of the idea that believing we ought to do something involves believing that it is possible ("ought-implies-can"). For if our subject acts from what she takes to be her duty in order to bring about a certain end (helping the needy via giving to that charity) then she *already*—just by taking herself to be bound to do this—presupposes that her end is really, practically possible. This means that she *already* presupposes the existence of whatever is required to make it really, practically possible: the poor, the charity, the causal path, and so on. There's no need to appeal to any hopes she has in the matter.

As though to confirm hope's otiosity, after stating his three questions in the Canon, Kant proceeds to focus on Belief (*Glaube*)[7]—a shift that leads many commentators to ignore the distinction between the concepts of hope and Belief when discussing the third question. Even more strikingly, the classic presentation of the moral theistic proof in the second *Critique*, too, almost entirely marginalizes hope. There are a few uses of the word, but the "proof" proper goes from *ought* to *can* to *is*. There the end that we set is a bit more abstract, and not entirely empirical: we aim at a perfectly just situation in which happiness is exactly apportioned to virtue (Kant calls this state the "highest good"). When we will the highest good, so the argument goes, we also presuppose that it is really, practically possible. This in turn underwrites defeasible rational Belief (*Vernunftglaube*) in the *actuality* of whatever is required for the highest good to be really, practically possible— namely, the existence of God and the immortality of the soul (KpV, AA 05:124–125). Again, hope has dropped out; reflection on our moral duty directly grounds Belief.

Kant is not the first great mind to slip like this between thinking of some of our key moral and religious commitments in terms of what we would now call hope, and thinking of them as warranting more robust states like Belief (or faith or trust). In section 2, I will survey some pre-Kantian authors who also do this—not because they were confused, but because the relevant Greek and Latin terms simply had wider denotations. In section 3, I'll consider the way Kant's views seem to evolve on this issue—he starts off more optimistic but tends, especially in "Das Ende aller Dinge" (The End of All Things) of 1794—towards a kind of *hopeful pessimism* at best. I then examine (in section 4) a different version of Kant's moral proof that does, I think, succeed in locating a role for hope that is distinct from that of Belief, expectation, optimism, and so on. As we'll see, it is this "moral-psychological" version of Kant's argument that finally shows how hope—

for the Kantian mind at its best—can be an *essential* bridge between a practical ought and a theoretical is.

In sections 5 and 6, I turn to some contemporary work in two very different arenas—Anthropocene scholarship, and Christian eschatology—in order to look at how the concepts of hope and expectation are used in those contexts. We will see that although some of the recent discourses about the "good Anthropocene" slip beyond hope into full-blown optimism, most authors working on ecological and environmental topics are careful to keep the attitudes distinct and opt for hopeful pessimism (this for good reason, since there is not much rational room for optimism on ecological matters). By contrast, there is a strong temptation among leading contemporary theologians to follow earlier Christian authors to conflate hope with optimistic Belief, or even full-blown certainty.

My main point is this: although Kant himself does at times slip from talk of hope to talk of something more robust (like expectation or trust in the mode of Belief), and although various figures before and after him do the same, the Kantian mind at its best identifies an important role for unslipping hope to play. Sober, realistic reason (especially in the Anthropocene) is careful to avoid self-deception or pollyanna-ish naivete in circumstances where there is little to justify positive expectation in either a doxastic or a non-doxastic mode. Within those bounds, however, the Kantian mind *may* (*darf*) still tenaciously hope, and it may also employ various psychological techniques to support that hope. The result is an attractive kind of *hopeful pessimism* that can still underwrite defeasible moral justification for certain theoretical affirmations.

2 CLASSICAL/CHRISTIAN CONFLATIONS OF (WHAT WE WOULD CALL) HOPE AND EXPECTATION

The Greek word "*elpis*" can be translated into English as "hope," "expectation," "optimism," or even "confidence"—depending on context. Because "*elpis*" is ambiguous in this way, it is often difficult to tell which concept a classical author has in mind. To say that the tradition "slips" between the two concepts is not meant pejoratively, since some of these authors clearly did not have the contemporary distinction in mind. But *hope* and *expectation* do seem to be distinct concepts (where *optimism* is just the positive species of expectation). We can see the differences along at least three axes:

- How *likely the subject takes the outcome to be*
- How *valuable the subject takes the outcome to be*
- How *valuable it is to have the attitude in question*

The following table provides the overall picture:

Table 2.1 Hope, Expectation, Optimism.

	Hope	Expectation	Optimism (= positive expectation)
Subjective probability estimate must be >0	√	√	√
Subjective probability estimate must be >0.5		√	√
Must be aimed at perceived good	√		√
Is typically good to have	?	?	?

The first thing to note here is that the "subjective probability" estimate in the first two rows can take the form of ordinary belief (Kant's term is *Überzeugung*), or it can take the form of Belief/faith (*Glaube*). So if we believe that *p* is likely, we expect that *p*. But we also count as expecting that *p* if we have Belief (i.e., faith) rather than ordinary belief that *p* is likely to be true. A simpler way to put this is to say that expectation comes in both doxastic and non-doxastic forms.

In the case of hope, the non-zero probability estimate regarding the outcome can likewise take the form of belief or Belief.[8] The latter, of course, is what happens in Kant's moral proof—no empirical or theoretical evidence is in the offing, and so ordinary belief must be "denied" on evidentialist grounds in order to "make room" for Belief (Bxxx). The commitment to the real, practical possibility of the highest good thus takes the form of firm Belief, as does the resulting commitment to the existence of God and the future life of the soul.

In this paper, I will focus mostly on the top two rows in the table. But first a few comments about the third and fourth rows. Regarding the third: it is clear that the domains of hope and expectation differ on this score. Hope always aims at what the subject *perceives* as good, while expectation can aim at the perceived good or the perceived bad (I can expect my own execution, after all). This makes it useful to have the concept of *optimism* in hand as well: it is the species of expectation that aims at what the subject perceives as good.

Regarding the fourth row, and the question mark in the "Hope" column: the majority of elpistologists in the history of western philosophy (as well as in contemporary positive psychology) regard hope as *typically* a good thing to have, and Kant is part of that tradition. There is an important minority report, however—prominent in the Greek and Roman Stoics as well as in Spinoza and various non-western traditions—according to which hope is typically bad because it is often accompanied by fear and makes us vulnerable to disappointment. This is particularly true in cases where we invest a great deal in obtaining the object of the hope. Hope can also be bad when it leads us to fail to take precautions. Thus Seneca pictures hope as shackled to fear, like a prisoner and the guard that escorts him: "Both belong to a mind in suspense, to a mind in a state of anxiety through looking into the future" (Seneca 1969, Letter 5, 38).

Regarding the value of expectation/optimism: if we assume that our subjective probability estimates reliably track objective probabilities, then these states are also *typically* good to have. That's just because it's typically good to have commitments regarding what is in fact likely to be true. There is a movement in contemporary psychology (and pop culture) that argues that it is typically good to have positive expectations regarding things the subject regards as good, regardless of the objective probabilities. Those who are less impressed with "the power of positive thinking"[9] will be less persuaded of that; hence the question mark in the table.

Returning to the first two rows: I noted that the classical tradition often uses "*elpis*," "*euelpis*," and their cognates in contexts where a subject takes the outcome to be *likely* to obtain. In such cases it is best to translate these terms as "expectation." For example: Aristotle in a passage from the *Rhetoric* says that "*elpis* for some sort of good is confidence" that can lead the youth astray (2.12, 1389a, 26–28; see Gravlee 2000). In contemporary parlance, we would *not* call this "hope" but rather "expectation" or (if the outcome is regarded as good) a kind of "optimism" that produces "confidence." That's not because the youth could not also have hope: psychologically speaking, hope is compatible with optimism regarding a desired outcome ("I hope and expect that you will be there!"). But

we typically follow an "assert-the-stronger" policy in such cases: if I am optimistically expecting something good and then ascribe mere hope to myself, I am liable to mislead you into thinking that my probability estimate is much lower than it is. If I say, for example, "I really hope the sun will warm the earth tomorrow" when I fully expect it to do so, I've violated the norm in a way that may lead you to worry that solar misfunction is a serious risk (see Chignell 2013 and Chignell 2023a for more argument here).

The New Testament, too, seems to associate "*elpis*" not with what we would call hope but rather with positive expectation or optimism. "Be joyful in hope" (Rom. 12.12); "in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began" (Tit. 1.2). *Joyfulness* seems out of place if the outcome in question is not regarded as highly likely; and naturally if God has indeed promised that *p*, then a high probability estimate seems warranted. Elsewhere, though, we find the recognition that hope is less confident than faith: "Now faith (*pistis*) is the substance of things-hoped-for (*elpisomenōn*); it is the evidence (*elegchó*) of things that do not appear" (Heb. 11.1).

Philosophers and theologians in the subsequent Christian tradition fluctuate between construing *elpis* ("*spes*" in Latin) as directed towards a good outcome that is taken to be *at least possible* (i.e., what we would call hope) and a good outcome that seems *very likely* or *secure* (what we would call positive expectation or optimism). The latter application of the term typically occurs when authors are thinking of it as a theological virtue (see Augustine's "man of good hope" [Augustine [420] 1961, ch. 31]). Thomas Aquinas, however, is characteristically clear about these conceptual distinctions, and simply distinguishes two different kinds of *spes*. The first kind is the infused theological virtue—this is a habitual, confident expectation whose traditional object is God and the afterlife. But the second kind of hope is a passion that can take many different objects. Aquinas calls it a "movement of appetite," and his analysis sounds quite contemporary: "Hope is a movement of appetite aroused by the perception of what is agreeable, future, arduous, and *possible of attainment*. It is the tendency of an appetite towards this sort of object" (Aquinas [1265–1274] 1920, 1a2ae.40–44; my emphasis).[10] Here the doxastic presupposition involved in the passion of hope is the "perception" that its object is at least *possible*.[11] Elsewhere we're told that "hoping would be out of the question if the good that is hoped for did not appear possible" (ibid., 2a2ae.17,7).[12]

Despite the Thomistic clarity on this point, subsequent authors muddy the waters again by using the term (*spes*, "hope," *Hoffnung*, etc.) to refer to what we would call positive expectation or optimism. I won't go through all the texts here, but it is easy to find passages in Bonaventure, Calvin, Hobbes, Descartes, Locke, and Hume that use "hope" to refer to an attitude involving (in Locke's words) "the thought of a probably future enjoyment of a thing" (Locke [1690] 1975). Influenced by these classical authors, no doubt, the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites the following as the two primary meanings of "hope":

1. expectation of something desired; desire combined with expectation.
2. feeling of trust or confidence.

Contemporary psychologists also tend to slip between two notions here: the leading "Hope Scales" theory articulated by C. R. Snyder, for instance, takes hope to be "the perception that one can reach desired goals." The "can" there sounds like a belief in mere possibility. But Snyder and colleagues go on to try to develop measures that characterize this "perception" in terms of the ability to find "pathways" to the hoped-for outcome, as well as the "agency" to take those pathways when they open up. On the conceptual map

provided above, however, the latter sort of "pathway" and "agency" thinking sounds much closer to expectation and optimism than to mere hope.[13]

It is very unusual for contemporary Anglophone philosophers to side with Thomas Aquinas over John Locke, the *OED*, and contemporary psychologists, but a quick survey of the (small but growing) literature suggests that most authors now clearly distinguish hope from expectation, as well as from trust and confidence.[14] Table 2.1 displays the motivation: hope is importantly different from expectation in that it can be directed at outcomes that the subject regards as *merely* possible, and thus be accompanied by fear of disappointment. This is what had Seneca and Spinoza worried. *Expectation*, by contrast, always involves the estimation that the state is more probable than not; it may even be certain, and so there is less room for fear. And its object need not be perceived by the subject as good.

3 KANT ON HOPE AND EXPECTATION

For Kant, as we have seen, the primary object of hope is happiness, and if it is rationally *permissible* hope (hope that we "may" have) then the happiness must be apportioned to our moral worthiness. In different contexts, Kant suggests that such hope, if rational, can underwrite Beliefs regarding the direction of history, its supersensible superintendent, and our individual destinies. However, as we saw earlier, the canonical versions of the moral proof in the first and second *Critiques* render hope otiose: they move from the fact that we ought to will the highest good to Belief in the existence of whatever is required for the real, practical possibility of the highest good. It is perhaps unfair to say that Kant is "conflating" the two concepts in those contexts; he just hasn't zeroed in on the distinctive role that hope plays in his system, and is more interested in the Beliefs that it presupposes.

Interestingly, as Kant witnesses various political disappointments (in particular concerning the accession of Friedrich Wilhelm II and the French Revolution), he seems less willing to express optimism regarding this-worldly history, and is also a bit cagier regarding what to say about justice in the world to come. Whereas his pre-critical 1759 essay "Versuch einiger Betrachtungen über den Optimismus" (An Attempt at Some Remarks on Optimism) stoutly defends the full-dress Leibnizean best-possible-world theory, the 1791 essay "Über das Misslingen aller philosophischen Versuche in der Theodizee" (On the Failure of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy) recommends skepticism as to whether evils contribute to a greater good—in this world or the next.

By this time, Kant is also clearly distinguishing hope from expectation. In the "Failure" essay he dismisses theological efforts to show that we can reasonably "expect [*erwarten*]" that "in a future world a different order of things will obtain, and each will receive that which his deeds here below are worthy of according to moral judgment" (ÜdM, AA 08:262). Instead, Kant follows what he takes to be the biblical example of Job, and says that apart from the natural laws we simply have no basis for conjecture regarding how an afterlife might be arranged. Thus although reason might "allow itself an appeal to patience, and the *hope* of a future improvement, how can it *expect* [*erwarten*] any such thing?" Kant concludes that, given what we know of the laws, "the agreement of human fate with divine justices, according to the concepts that we construe of the latter, is just *as little to be expected* there as here" (ibid.; my emphasis). So even in the absence of warrant for expectation, Kant still thinks that we may *hope* for the highest good (and form Beliefs in what its possibility presupposes).

A similar evolution occurs in the essays in the philosophy of history and politics. Well into the 1780s, Kant's efforts in this domain are largely optimistic in tone.[15] But by the early 1790s, Friedrich Wilhelm II (and his reign of censorship) had come to the throne in Prussia, while Robespierre (and his Reign of Terror) had taken hold in France. In "The End of All Things" (1794), Kant seems open to the idea that the final end of history could be a "perverted" one in which evil has the last word and Christianity is the culprit:

> If Christianity should ever come to the point where it ceased to be worthy of love (which could very well transpire if instead of its gentle spirit it were armed with commanding authority), then, because there is no neutrality in moral things . . ., a disinclination and resistance to [Christianity] would become the ruling mode of thought among people; and the **AntiChrist**, who is taken to be the forerunner of the last day, would begin his—albeit short—regime (presumably based on fear and self-interest); but then, because Christianity, though once allegedly destined to be the world religion, would not after all be favored by fate to become it, and **the** (*perverse*) *end of all things*, in a moral respect, would arrive.
>
> —EaD, AA 08:339; Kant's bold

Admittedly, there are passages from the mid- to late-1790s that suggest that Kant, if pressed, would still endorse optimism (in the mode of firm Belief, not belief) about the trajectory of history and our ultimate moral end. But these late-career reflections, especially in "The End of All Things," also show him sympathetically entertaining the idea that hope is all you need. In any case, his final position was much weaker than many of his contemporaries who viewed the optimistic *expectation* of dramatic moral progress as clearly both justified and politically essential.[16] In the nineteenth century this expectation took the form of *epistemic* certainty (rather than mere Belief) regarding the machinations of reason, Spirit, and capital to bring about positive change. In this respect, then, it is Hegel and Marx, rather than Kant, who are the true heirs of Paul, Augustine, Bonaventure, and Calvin.

I now want to turn to a third variety of Kantian moral argument—one that comes to prominence at this same time in the writings of the 1790s, and that preserves a distinct and crucial role for hope.

4 THE MORAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL ARGUMENT AGAINST DESPAIR

Obviously there were practical arguments—arguments for theoretical conclusions that draw on practical (i.e., pragmatic, moral) considerations—well before Kant. Pascal had his pragmatic wager, while Arnauld and Nicole include a broadly practical argument for God's existence in *La Logique ou l'art de penser* (Port Royal Logic) of 1662. Recent work on C. A. Crusius—an eighteenth-century Pietist philosopher and pastor whose work deeply influenced Kant—indicates that he had already worked out the basic ingredients of Kant's moral proof, including a conception of the practical "*Belief*" that results from it (see Gava 2019).

For Kant, the goal of the moral proof is to ground Belief in the existence of God, freedom, and the future life of the soul. As noted earlier, the canonical form of the argument (found most prominently in the second *Critique*) says that we ought to will the highest good or perfect justice, and that we may then hope for its attainment. If the hope is rational, then it provides moral justification for Belief in what it presupposes—the

existence of God and the future life. We also saw, however, that this version can be articulated so as to make the hope component otiose.

The variety of moral proof that makes hope *essential* is harder to piece together from the texts, but significant gestures can be found in writings from the 1790s—especially the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Critique of the Power of Judgment) (1790), *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason) (1793), and "Über den Gemeinspruch: Das mag in der Theorie richtig sein, taugt aber nicht für die Praxis" (On the Common Saying: That May Be Correct in Theory, But It's No Use in Practice) (1793). I have reconstructed this form of argument in detail elsewhere; here I will just provide a sketch.[17] The main idea is that, for most of us anyway, sustaining what Kant calls moral resolve (*moralische Entschliessung* [Rel, AA 06:5]) in the face of apparent inefficacy and widespread injustice *psychologically* requires that we be able to hope that the ends we are striving for will be fulfilled—that the justice we are trying to promote will be achieved. The fact that such hope is required (at least for some of us) to sustain resolve provides it with a key kind of moral justification (for those same some of us).

But for Kant a deep, life-structuring hope like that presupposes, in turn, a firm commitment to the practical possibility of its object: in this case the real, practical possibility of the Highest Good. And that commitment only makes sense if we postulate the existence of the entities or states that are required to make it really, practically possible—i.e., God and the afterlife of incompatibilistically free agents. The commitment to these items cannot take the form of ordinary belief (*Überzeugung*)—which for Kant requires sufficient theoretical evidence—so it must take the form of Belief (*Glaube*). In short, if it is rational to seek to sustain our moral resolve, and if this involves implementing strategies to preserve our hope for certain outcomes, then we are defeasibly morally justified in adopting Belief in the existence of God and the future life. It's because we *may* hope for the highest good that we *may* defeasibly Believe in what's required for it to *be* practically possible. From *ought* to *may hope* to *is*.[18]

I think this moral-psychological argument structure is interesting in its own right, but also interesting in application to naturalistic, this-worldly contexts. We saw above that the widespread hope to "make a difference" as an activist, philanthropist, or consumer might require for its sustenance the Belief that there is a mechanism in the world that can bring about the real-world difference in question. If Kant's moral-psychological argument is sound, then there are defeasible moral grounds for such Belief, even in the absence of sufficient evidence for such a mechanism. In this way, analogues of Kant's argument might be able to support theoretical commitments regarding individual or collective impacts, or even about the direction of the arc of history.[19]

In the next section, I consider one such analogue according to which the demoralizing effects of pessimistic realism in the Anthropocene can be offset by participation in hope-sustaining "reenchanting" efforts—even at a very local level where one's actions are unlikely to make a difference. The goal is not to get rid of the realism or the pessimism, since they are based in overwhelming empirical/theoretical evidence. Rather, the goal is to see how we might supplement the pessimism with resolve-sustaining hope.

5   SUSTAINING HOPE IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

By comparison to most eighteenth- and nineteenth-century figures, philosophers and social scientists nowadays are cagey about claims regarding historical or moral progress. There are still a few optimists who contend—on empirical grounds rather than armchair

reflection—that the technological achievements and apparent moral progress of the last few centuries provide reason to expect that both will continue.[20] But most people seem to be inductive pessimists regarding our economic and especially ecological trajectory.

Those who feel rationally compelled to such pessimism about our predicament still have a choice about whether to accompany it with, for example, (a) a handwringing sort of despair, (b) a Stoic sort of apathy, (c) a Montaignian-Nietzschean sort of cheerful acceptance, or (d) a resolute Kantian search for what we may still be able to hope, in an effort to sustain our moral resolve. Even if the crooked timber of humanity cannot be straightened to the point where optimism is warranted, the Kantian mind at its best still asks: what *may* we hope, and what sorts of postures and activities can we take up, while staying within the bounds of reason, in order to *sustain* such hope? In his works from the early 1790s, Kant offers the moral-psychological argument in answer to these questions. In our own context, the massive literature on the "Anthropocene" is a good place to look for other suggestions.[21] Here I have space for just a quick peek.

"Anthropocene" refers to the period in natural history when human beings and their effects on the rest of nature become as potent as a geologic force. The term offers, among other things, a new and more evocative way of talking about the Weberian idea that our natural environment can become so rationalized, misshapen, and "disenchanted" that the line between technocratic reason and "Nature" itself is blurred. In the dystopian narratives of the Anthropocene, *homo sapiens* has been replaced (in the words of sociologist Bronislaw Szerszynski) by "*homo consumens*, that other-than-human assemblage of humans, technology, fossil fuels, and capitalist relations" (Szerszynski 2012, 175).

The German elpistologist Jürgen Moltmann sketched an apocalyptic vision like this back at the turn of the millennium, just as "Anthropocene" was first starting to be used by geochemists, biologists, anthropologists, and geographers to characterize our new geological home (*Heimat*). Moltmann declared that "It is impossible to make oneself 'the master and possessor of nature' if one is still part of nature and dependent on it. The modern culture of mastery has produced its own downside, which reveals its catastrophic effects in the disappearance of natural living spaces" (Moltmann 2004a, 4). And the disappearance, he might have added, of natural living *species*—faster than in previous mass extinction events, by most estimates (De Vos et al. 2015).

Some theorists of the Anthropocene (especially some of the more Marxian and "deep ecology" authors) both expect and welcome the sort of ultimate economic collapse that would, after a period of inevitable disruption, make room for human life that is in greater harmony with non-human nature. But that eschaton is very hard to conceive, and not just from an environmental point of view: here consider Frederick Jameson's famous suggestion that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism.

Other theorists argue that we can expect deliverance from such ecological disasters, even within the current economic system, as a result of individual and collective action. One of the most radical individual actions involves *refusing* to conceive (or "expect") in the biological way: in progressive pockets across North America (e.g., college towns), it is not unusual to come across the anti-natalist bumper sticker: "Save the Earth, Don't Give Birth" and birthrates across the developed world are falling.[22] On the other hand, optimism about our species' future is sometimes encouraged by reflection on our collective powers of ingenuity: if only there are enough people ("one billion Americans"?) with the resources and will to face the task.[23] Stewart Brand (long-time editor of the *Whole Earth Catalog*) is now an unyielding techno-optimist who writes in the expectation of a "good

Anthropocene"—i.e., a time when our environmental plight is viewed as a series of (what Rex Tillerson once called) "engineering problems" that will be overcome by innovation ("two guys in a garage in Palo Alto").[24]

So there are expectations on both sides. But, somewhat orthogonally, there are also discussions about the role and power of hope when combined with pessimism. Soon after Moltmann wrote his millennial reflections on "Progress and Abyss" and what he calls, following Bill McKibben, "the end of nature," there were the 9/11 attacks and other human-made miseries that followed. As the human world was gathering for another set of wars, Moltmann turned away from the abyss and instead wrote hopeful messianic reflections on "The Promise of the Child."[25] Similarly, some ecology-focused geographers and sociologists find it necessary to ignore their long-term pessimistic expectations and do things to cultivate hope, if only in order to sustain moral resolve.

Holly Jean Buck is one of the latter: while resisting the slip into Brand's optimism about the good Anthropocene, Buck calls for more hopeful visions of "the charming Anthropocene"—where "charming" refers to a kind of "reenchanting" that we actively perform rather than seek outside ourselves in "nature." She asks: "If the Anthropocene were not an anthology of scary tales, drawn from an awkward bricolage of science and preternatural fears, what else could it be?" (Buck 2015, 2). This is in effect the Kantian question about hope applied to our current ecological predicament. It directs our focus away from reasonable but mostly pessimistic expectations regarding the rapacious denizens of the Anthropocene, and invites us to focus in hope on a less likely but perhaps still *just* possible future in which "human traits like tending, altruism, creativity, art and craftsmanship, and cooperation reclaim their status as basic human nature" (ibid.).[26]

The generation of people in the global north who came of age around the millennial turn is the first generation most of whose members expect to live less *prosperously* than their parents. Overall, their attitude is the reverse of the old "middle-class" assumption that (in Moltmann's words) "the all-important thing was social advancement from one generation to the next" (Moltmann 2004a, 7). There are some emotional downsides to this, to be sure, but one of the positive effects of recognizing our situation in the Anthropocene is that it reduces expectations regarding the self and instead refocuses our minds (in hope) on crucial, large-scale collective ends.

This is clearly reminiscent of Kant's claim that we must—each of us—hope for happiness, but only as *part* of the collective accomplishment of the highest good, to which we each individually contribute. In keeping with the moral-psychological reflections in the last section, the Kantian millennial mind will look for ways in which local, individual and communal "enchanting practices" might help *sustain* those hopes, and our moral resolve in general. Buck puts this nicely: "We know about sea level rise and ocean acidification and the changing nitrogen cycle, about planetary boundaries and potential tipping points. Enchanting practices are no stand-in for large-scale political change, but as companion to proactive critique they can help create the critical mass of engagement and care to give humans and nonhumans a habitable Anthropocene" (Buck 2015, 8).

Again, the Kantian mind (of any generation) is not interested in self-deceptive pollyanna-ism, but it does seek out—and regard as morally justifiable—reasonable psychological strategies for sustaining moral hope and resolve. As opposed to the "effective altruist" impulse always to seek to identify and do what is most likely to make the largest difference, some of these reenchanting strategies may involve hyper-local efforts that don't obviously connect to the larger concern. Still, Kant's argument (as I've interpreted it, anyway) allows us to go from those rational hopes to the defeasible Belief

that our efforts "help create the critical mass of engagement" required to make the Anthropocene more habitable. At the very least, cultivating such hope in the local context can galvanize us to re-enter the global or collective struggle, even if we have no real expectations for ultimate success.

6 EXPECTATION IN THE ESCHATON

We have seen how the Kantian account of hope, and the moral-psychological argument against despair, might be applicable in the face of massive and apparently implacable systems of ecological degradation. In this section, I want to look briefly at some prominent contemporary eschatologies that invoke the concept of hope, but end up slipping once again into talk of positive expectation. I mentioned earlier that many historical Christian authors prize hope—it is one of the theological virtues that is infused by God and directed towards the individual and communal life hereafter. I also noted that they often use the concept (*elpis*, *spes*) to pick out attitudes that involve much higher probability estimates regarding the end in question (in this case—the end of the world itself!).

Moltmann is again the seminal figure here: the publication of his *Theologie der Hoffnung* (Theology of Hope) in 1964 (English 1967) was a watershed event not only in traditional systematic theology but also liberation theology, Black theology, and political theology circles.[27] Moltmann's main contribution was to develop the Augustinian idea that a proper understanding of the eschaton views it as *coeval* with the present vale of tears, rather than as some far-off idealized future. The eschaton is *adventus*: still coming and yet *already here*. Many readers take him to be speaking (in Kantian terms) "regulatively"—i.e., setting out an ideal in terms of which we can conceive our current moral and political efforts. This thought—that hope could be directed towards a this-worldly outcome which is both already present and "not yet"—also had an impact on theological discussions of the traditional object of hope: the afterlife.

Moltmannian elpistology is thus broadly Kantian in a few ways: because of the German Protestantism in which it was fashioned, because it uses a traditional metaphysical idea in a merely regulative fashion, and because it is concerned with the "future life." But also because it suggests that *if* the highest good is to obtain at all, then it must in some sense already be upon us. Recall that for Kant, the highest good is a state of perfect justice: everyone is happy precisely in proportion to her degree of worthiness to be happy. But this means that *all* good and bad acts—and all the joys and sufferings past, present, and future—are partly *constitutive* of the highest good. All of them figure into the vast fastidious divine calculation by which justice is ultimately done. It is in this (limited) sense that the eschaton, for the Kantian mind, is both already and not yet.

Some theologies of hope distinguish clearly between hope and expectation/optimism.[28] Moltmann himself, however, is ultimately more influenced by Hegel, Marx, and Bloch than he is by Kant. As a result, in his *magnum opus* (as opposed to the later messianic essay) it often sounds as though he views the irruption of the eschaton into our present context as grounds for a kind of *optimistic expectation* (even if it is still called "*Hoffnung*"). But that, as we have seen, is quite alien to the Kantian mind at its best: the question about hope should be the question about what we can long for, focus on, strive for, and seek strategies to preserve, even if we also reasonably judge it to be *completely unlikely*. Moltmannian hope, by contrast, seems to slip quickly into Belief/faith (*Glaube*), anticipation, and even sanguine certainty about the object of hope.

More recently, theologian David Kelsey (2009) has written a monumental three-volume theological anthropology titled *Eccentric Existence* in which he takes up the doctrine of eschatology *second* rather than *third*. This is very Moltmannian: the account of hope and the eschaton comes directly after the account of creation and *before* any discussion of sin, atonement, and salvation. Hope and its orientation to the *already and not yet* thus play an essential role in human flourishing even prior (logically speaking) to the fall into what Kant would call "radical evil" and the tradition would call "Original Sin."

So the vision Kelsey articulates has three stages: first creation, then eschaton, and only after that redemption. With creation comes an awareness of our finitude but not of fallenness or sin. Directly in response to that finitude there is an unexpected promise of individual and collective "consummation." This promise gives us a sense of our "ultimate context" and turns our day-to-day life-worlds (Kelsey uses the Husserlian term) into "promising *proximate* contexts in which we live on borrowed time" (Kelsey 2009, 501). Awareness of the promise in turn allows us to see that "personal bodies flourish in appropriate response to God relating to them," and that "the appropriate response to God relating to them in this mode is *hope*" (ibid.; my emphasis).

This logic of this sequence allows Kelsey to say that the real basis of hope is not a philosophy of developmental psychology such as we find in Erikson, or a philosophy of history such as we find in Hegel, Marx, or Bloch, or even a "theology of hope" like Moltmann's which, Kelsey thinks, still trades too much in these other modes of discourse. Rather, the hope is an almost involuntary, felt response to the "actuality of God keeping God's promise"—an actuality which the Christian, anyway, encounters in the life and work of Christ (Kelsey 2009, 504). So "eccentric" hope is *not* about what is merely possible; rather, it is "grounded in an actuality—namely, the already inaugurated eschatological kingdom" (ibid., 522). Not just "grounded" in but also directed towards that actuality: for Kelsey, "Jesus is in his person the actualization of the eschaton, the end and goal of the project of human subjectivity's full self-actualization" (ibid., 95).

This raises a host of questions, most of which are not important for present purposes. The point I want to highlight is simply that "hope" as discussed by contemporary philosophers is too anemic for Kelsey's purposes—a "focus on the desired outcome under the aspect of possibility" (Chignell 2023a) is not an adequate response to the "unexpected promise of consummation." Rather, "eccentric hope" is an "attitude of expectancy that a good and desired transformation of our quotidian contexts, now actually begun, will be fully actualized" and "Joyous . . . a certain glad hopefulness but not a gleeful hopefulness, a happy hope but not a euphoric hope." It is a "cheerful confidence that is anything but complacency" (Kelsey 2009).

This hope also has public effects. It is a "settled and long-lasting attitude . . . that orients personal bodies in the quotidian context as agents, disposing them across extended periods of time to engage in certain types of socially established cooperative human action"; "a disposition to enact certain types of practices publicly"; and "best defined as personal bodies' orientation that disposes them for enactments of certain practices in public proximate contexts" (Kelsey 2009).

If we take this talk of "expectancy" and "confidence" seriously, then it looks like the doxastic component of eccentric hope involves a much higher probability estimate than mere possibility. Sometimes it even sounds close to certainty: an "attitude of expectancy" that eschatological consummation "will be fully actualized." This makes sense of Kelsey's (New Testament-style) talk of the accompanying affective state as that of "joyous" or

"cheerful confidence," rather than longing, anxiety, or fear. Thus for Kelsey, the public (and often religious) practices that eccentric hope motivates will presumably be much more decisive than the tentative, local efforts at "reenchantment" that Buck recommends as a means of sustaining hope.

Put another way: Kelsey explicitly distances himself from Hegel, Marx, and Bloch with respect to his account of eschatological hope, and he is not a determinist-utopian about the future. But in the end his ultra-confident "expectancy" about a divine promise and his focus on the already-actual aspect of it makes the *adventus* seem just as inevitable as Marx's revolution. In effect, Kelsey rehabilitates the classical-Christian conflation (or at least ambiguity) regarding *elpis/spes* that the Kantian mind at its best will resist. If "eccentric hope" (or Christian hope generally) is a joyous expectancy of a flourishing for each and all of us, then it is not what we or Kant mean by "hope" at all, but rather *already* the assurance of things we *might* have merely hoped for.[29]

7 CONCLUSION: *HOMO RELIGIOSUS* AND *HOMO SPERANS*

Kant says in his lectures on the philosophy of religion, as well as in the published *Religion* itself, that the "minimum of theology" or "minimum of cognition in religion" is the Belief that God's existence is really possible (RelPö, AA 28:998; Rel, AA 06:153–154n). This modal commitment is all that is required as part of our duty, but it admittedly seems like a rather low bar for genuine religiosity.

That said, the commitment to possibility is accompanied, for Kant, by a sophisticated complex of other attitudes, desires, and affections—including (on my reading) deep, life-structuring *hope* for the existence of God, the consummation of creation, and even extramundane assistance—that would not fit well within a baldly atheistic framework.[30] It might also involve hope for the advent of a new kind of human being here at the end of all things. This would not be mere *homo consumens* but rather *homo sperans*: a being that engages in short-term reenchanting strategies for sustaining resolve—the kind of resolve that in turn supports long-term collective efforts that might make a real difference. The hope for the advent of *homo sperans* is the hope that we become the sorts of beings whose ecological and geological legacy is less devastating than the one that we now reasonably expect.

One main reason to resist the way non-Kantian thinkers (and the *OED*!) seem to slip between hope and expectation, then, is just for the sake of conceptual tidiness—clearly there are two different concepts here and it's good to keep them distinct. A more important reason, however, is that doing so makes conceptual room for the idea that an authentic moral-religious life can be based in pessimistic, non-expectant but still tenaciously-lived hope. This is the sort of hope that Kant himself describes in the "Theory and Practice" essay of 1793:

> It is quite irrelevant whether any empirical evidence suggests that these plans, which *are founded only on hope*, may be unsuccessful. For the idea that something which has hitherto been unsuccessful will therefore never be successful does not justify anyone in abandoning even a pragmatic or technical aim . . . . This applies even more to moral aims, which, so long as it is not demonstrably impossible to fulfil them, amount to duties.
>
> —TP, 08:309–310; my emphasis

As long as our apparently futile efforts—which are "founded only on hope"—are not *demonstrably impossible*—we can, and in many cases ought to, keep performing them. For Kant himself, as we know, this hope presupposes Belief in the actual existence of God and the future life of the soul. But in the passages on the "minimum of theology" quoted above, it looks like he is willing to say that Belief in the real possibility of those items is all we need for religious hope. Such a low-bar approach would make it easier for people to train themselves (liturgically,[31] perhaps, or through Buck's "tending" and "enchanting" practices) to focus on the real possibility of good but unlikely outcomes (including even the highest good). That's the propositional side of deep, activism-sustaining hope. There is also a yearning, passionate, affective side that makes it seem like a genuinely religious stance, even if it is in no way certain, expectant, or "eccentric" in Kelsey's sense. In this way, deep Kantian moral hope is compatible with the pessimistic expectation that the end of all things will indeed turn out to be disastrous and "perverse." For the Kantian mind in the Anthropocene, then, the "minimum of theology" might be just the right amount.[32]

NOTES

1. This chapter is a slightly revised version of a paper that appears in Eckel and DuJardin 2022. It is published here under open access license: http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/.

2. Although see Chignell 2021a for a gesture at an argument according to which hope is in fact the primary topic of the third *Critique*.

3. This is of course the "Universal Law" formulation of the Categorical Imperative. Allen Wood (1999) has argued that what is really action-guiding for Kant is not this but the much less formal "Formula of Humanity."

4. Kant's term is "real possibility." I include "practical" here to indicate that it's not merely what contemporary philosophers call "metaphysical" possibility; rather, the outcome is supposed to be accomplishable by the beings and powers in the actual world. Compare Wood 1999 for the argument that "realizability" is a key part of the argument and Willaschek 2016 for this use of "practical possibility."

5. In his contribution to this volume, Günter Zöller appeals to Grimm's Dictionary to argue that "*dürfen*" was used not only in the sense of "permission" but also in the sense of "need" (*bedürfen*), or maybe even "having grounds for" (*Grund haben*). So the third question may involve questions like "What do I *need* to hope for?" and "What do I have grounds to hope for?" Thanks to Claudia Blöser for discussion here.

6. See Chignell 2020 and Chignell 2023b for some efforts to do that.

7. I use "Belief" to translate "*Glaube*": the latter's meaning, for Kant, is different in important ways from "belief," "faith," and "trust" in contemporary English (see Chignell 2007 and 2021a). But compare Blöser (2021), who prefers to translate "*Glaube*" into English as "trust."

8. In humdrum cases of hope this cognitive condition might be a mere presupposition or taking-for-granted that doesn't involve the formation of an actual belief. See Chignell 2013 and 2023a for more discussion.

9. The reader is advised to take a quick look at *The Secret* on Netflix for a particularly exaggerated form of this kind of doctrine.

10. Although I think Aquinas gets the claim about mere possibility right, from a contemporary point of view we wonder about his further claims that hope is only properly directed to what is "arduous" and "future." Aquinas follows the classical tradition (e.g., Cicero) in viewing desire as a movement of appetite towards what is agreeable and not-yet-obtained. He also incorporates the Platonic distinction between passions of the concupiscible and irascible parts of the sensitive soul. This concept of hope takes it to be a passion of the irascible part—the part that "resists the attacks that hinder what is suitable" for us (I.81.2). This is presumably why he says that hope's object must be "arduous" to obtain. This part of the concept has fallen out of the contemporary conception, however: it seems clear that hope can be directed at something relatively easy to acquire ("I hope we'll have ice cream after dinner!"). It also seems clear that hope can take the present or past as an object ("I hope my horse won yesterday!"). Thanks to Ryan Darr for discussion of Aquinas here. For helpful studies of Aquinas on hope, see Bobier 2020 and Pinsent 2020; for a criticism, see Wolterstorff 2004.

11. Kierkegaard is rather Thomistic here. He says that "hope is a passion for the possible" (2009, 106ff.). But like Aquinas he clearly delineates this "natural" or "pre-moral" hope—which involves a great deal of uncertainty—from "Christian hope," which is secure (cf. Fremstedal 2012).

12. To fill this out, it would be worth inquiring further into the notion of "possibility" that Aquinas is using here.

13. See Gallagher et al. 2020 for an account of Snyder and the positive psychology tradition.

14. One exception to this is Wheatley 1958.

15. e.g., in the 1784 essay, "Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürglicher Absicht" (Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose).

16. Here I differ from Blöser, who thinks that for Kant our moral hope is "sure." This threatens to fall back into the classical conflation in a way that the Kantian mind at its best will strive to resist. See Blöser 2021.

17. See Chignell 2020 and 2023b. Robert M. Adams (1979) was one of the first contemporary scholars to defend this broadly psychological version of a moral argument—an argument from the need to avoid despair and "demoralization" in ethical life. For other efforts in a similar direction see Fugate 2014, Ebels-Duggan 2016, Chance and Pasternack 2018, and Pasternack (present volume).

18. Kant's view differs here from that of the author of the epistle to the Hebrews. Kant thinks that the hope and the faith (Belief) have different objects, whereas the biblical author takes them to have the same object and different epistemic standings ("faith shows the reality of things hoped for").

19. For more elaborate discussion of this, see Chignell 2020 and 2023b.

20. See Steven Pinker's recent books, most of which repeat the argument that from the perspective of human health and well-being, things have been getting quite a bit better, and so we can continue to expect more of the same.

21. Particularly relevant here is the collection on *Ecology, Ethics, and Hope* edited by Brei (2016).

22. Another slightly less memorable phrase is Donna Haraway's: "Make Kin, Not Babies!" in Haraway 2015. For the most famous recent anti-natalist argument, see Benatar 2008.

23. See Yglesias' rather US-focused clarion call in his 2021.

24. Brand's notorious line in the final edition of his *Whole Earth Catalog* (1998) is effectively his response to people who question whether we ought to be interfering with the climate in such dramatic ways: "We are as gods and might as well get good at it." Cf. Hamilton 2015, the title of which is "The Theodicy of the 'Good Anthropocene.'"

25. This is the first chapter of his 2003 book which was translated into English as *In the End—The Beginning* (2004b).

26. For another vision of the Anthropocene that also includes both dystopian realism and hope (as well as sex, romantic love, and fly-fishing) see Nadzam and Jamieson 2015.

27. Both James Cone and Gustavo Gutiérrez have repeatedly cited Moltmann as an influence and key interlocutor. Cone (1984) makes it clear that despite this common heritage, Black theology and Latin American Liberation theology in that era developed independently. Thanks to Brendan Kolb for pointing this out to me.

28. Thus Cornel West, inspired by Cone: "Hope and optimism are different. Optimism tends to be based on the notion that there's enough evidence out there to believe things are gonna be better, much more rational, deeply secular, whereas hope looks at the evidence and says, 'It doesn't look good at all. Doesn't look good at all. Gonna go beyond the evidence to create new possibilities based on visions that become contagious to allow people to engage in heroic actions always against the odds, no guarantee whatsoever.' That's hope. I'm a prisoner of hope, though. Gonna die a prisoner of hope" (West 2008).

29. It is tempting to think that some Christian authors are thinking of "hope" along the lines of "trust." They already have expectations (or even certainty) regarding the ultimate providential outcome, but they sometimes have trouble "living into" what they expect, especially when faced with personal challenges and collective injustices. So "hope" becomes the virtue of "arduous" living into what one already expects. It would then not only be compatible with expectation but a kind of affective complement to it. (Thanks to Toni Alimi for making this point to me in conversation.) In future work, I'd like to examine the relationship between hope construed in this way and various contemporary accounts of "trust." There has also been some excellent work on this recently by Daniel McKaughan and Michael Pace (see Pace and McKaughan 2020).

30. For more on the "minimum of theology" see Wood 1991. On the rationality of hope for extramundane assistance see Chignell 2013 and Pasternack (present volume).

31. For more on this theme, see Chignell 2021a.

32. For helpful comments on earlier drafts of this chapter, I'm grateful to participants in the "Expectation and Joy" workshop at Yale University (especially John Hare, Jennifer Herdt, Jürgen Moltmann, and Miroslav Volf), to participants in the "Religion, Ethics, and Politics" workshop at Princeton University, and to an audience at the Institute for Philosophy and Religion at Boston University. I'm also grateful to Toni Alimi, Claudia Blöser, Ryan Darr, Alexander Englert, Judah Isseroff, Brendan Kolb, Katerina Mihaylova, and Allen Wood for written comments.

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