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Is a Sociology of Hope Possible? An Attempt to Recompose a Theoretical Framework and a Research Programme

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Abstract

The societal changes of the last century, especially in the aftermath of World War II, have led thinkers to imagine philosophical anthropology centred on the concept of hope. From very different perspectives, authors such as Ernst Bloch, Erich Fromm, and Hannah Arendt understood that hope is deeply connected with the condition and destiny of humanity. Various sociologists have developed concepts closely linked with hope: action, social change, utopia, revolution, emancipation, innovation, and trust. However, a coherent and systematic analysis is yet to emerge. Taking up the threads of this rich but fragmented reflection, this paper intends to outline the traits of a "sociology of hope" as a tool for critically interpreting today's society and the processes of change crisscrossing it, starting from some crucial questions: Who are the actors and historical bearers of hope? What are the main socio-historical forms of hope? What social, political, and cultural conditions favour the emergence and strengthening of this disposition? What are the effects and consequences on personal and social life?

Keywords Hope · Sociology of hope · Future · Trust · Emancipation · Social changes

Hope as an Anthropological Principle

Can hope be an object of study for sociology? Is it possible to develop a sociology of hope? Is a sociological research programme on hope possible?

To answer these questions, we will start with three renowned works of the post-World War II period that pose hope at the core of the definition of the human

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condition: Ernst Bloch's *Daz Prinzip Hoffnung* [*The Principle of Hope*], Eric Fromm's *The Revolution of Hope,* and Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*. The reference to these authors is justified in the fact that, although starting from very different perspectives, they understood that hope has profoundly to do with man's condition and destiny, and this was particularly significant at a time in history (post-World War II) when it was necessary to imagine a philosophical anthropology that combined a future time dimension with a life project that would push individuals to action.

Daz Prinzip Hoffnung [*The Principle of Hope*] is a three-volume work by Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch (1986/1959), written between 1937–1947 and revised between 1953–1959, the date of their first publication. In this work, Bloch reintroduces the Marxist prophetic principle in the light of his conviction that everything non-illusionary in the images of hope comes down to Marx and Marxism is the salvation of the soul core of utopia, it is the attainment of true humanity. Bloch's core idea is that the human condition is not suspended between being and not-being (as in most philosophical thinking), but between *being* and *not-yet being,* between *being* and *being-in-possibility*. Human beings are not made to rest in the present condition (always imperfect, surmountable and "to be surpassed"); instead, they desire and strive towards a world that does not yet exist, a new dimension of social being that better corresponds to their need for fulfilment. Hope is both a constitutive dimension of man's social being and a disposition that must be learned: "It is a question of learning hope. Its work does not renounce; it is in love with success rather than failure. Hope, superior to fear, is neither passive like the latter, nor locked into nothingness. The emotion of hope goes out of itself, makes people broad instead of confining them, cannot know nearly enough of what it is that makes them inwardly aimed, of what may be allied to them outwardly. The work of this emotion requires people who throw themselves actively into what is becoming, to which they themselves belong" (Bloch, 1986, I, p. 3). Hope, then, is the anticipation of what is not yet given; it develops toward an "ontology of the Not-Yet" (Bloch, 1986, I, p. 13). It has a cognitive and an affective dimension; it is a view of the world, but also an engagement and involvement with it (Bloch, 1986, I, p. 12). From the cognitive point of view, Bloch describes hope as a new form of access to reality, something that is "Not-Yet-Conscious" and reflects, in turn, an "objective possibility". From an emotional-affective point of view, Bloch distinguishes between "filled emotions" (whose object is already available) and "expectant emotions" which refer to something not yet available (Bloch, 1986, I, p. 74). Hope is a "positive expectant emotion" which counteracts negative emotions such as fear; it "is therefore the most human of all mental feelings and only accessible to men, and it also refers to the furthest and brightest horizon" (Bloch, 1986, I, p. 75). For Bloch, hope is not just a mixture of beliefs and desires about possible things or facts but a "militant optimism" that overcomes the existing horizon in the direction of "the horizon of the future" – a future already prefigured in the objective potential of reality.

The Revolution of Hope (2010/1968) is among Eric Fromm's last works. Fromm attempted an original synthesis of psychoanalysis and Marxism, not without echoes of the spirit of Jewish prophecy, which he absorbed in the devout environment he grew up in (Jay, 1973). The meaning of this book can be fully understood only in

parallel with what is perhaps Fromm's most important and influential work: *Escape from Freedom* (1969/1941). In this book, published during the Second World War, Fromm identifies two fundamental human needs: the need to escape loneliness (hence the need for relationship, commonality, solidarity) and the consciousness of oneself as an autonomous entity (the need for freedom, independence, autonomy). These two basic needs interact in both individual development and the relationship between the individual and society, finding different degrees of satisfaction according to the historical evolution of societies. In the last two centuries, however, greater autonomy (the positive aspect of freedom) has also led to greater loneliness and insecurity (the negative aspect). To cope with this situation, mankind developed "social characters", *i.e.*, modes of adaptation common to most members of contemporary societies, which, in his view, have the pathological aspect of "mechanisms of escape from freedom": *authoritarianism*, *destructiveness*, and *automation conformity* (Fromm, 1969, pp. 163–230). Authoritarianism found its apex in Nazism, while the "automation conformity" is the social character of most "normal" individuals in affluent societies.

Written in 1968, amongst the spread of the youth movement in the United States and Europe, *The Revolution of Hope* is a partial response to the problems raised in *Escape from Freedom*. In the introduction (*The Crossroads*), taking up a famous expression by Marx, Fromm observes that "A specter is stalking in our midst whom only a few see with clarity. It is not the old ghost of communism or fascism. It is a new specter: a completely mechanized society, devoted to maximal material output and consumption" (Fromm, 2010, p. 1). A leitmotiv in his reflections, Fromm notes that the human condition in advanced industrial societies, marked by widespread well-being, appears suspended between "The increasing dissatisfaction with our present way of life, its passiveness and silent boredom, its lack of privacy and its depersonalization, and the longing for a joyful, meaningful existence" (p. 4). People always need hope – but this need seems more acute and urgent in today's societies, shadowed by looming authoritarianism, destructiveness, and automaton-like conformism.

Fromm observes that hope is the expectation of "a fuller life, a state of greater aliveness, a liberation from eternal boredom". It is an active, vigilant, industrious expectation, since "it is non-hope if it has the quality of passiveness, and 'waiting for'—until the hope becomes, in fact, a cover for resignation, a mere ideology" (Fromm, 2010, p. 6). A little further on, he clarifies that: "Hope is paradoxical. It is neither passive waiting nor is it unrealistic forcing of circumstances that cannot occur. It is like the crouched tiger, which will jump only when the moment for jumping has come. Neither tired reformism nor pseudo-radical adventurism is an expression of hope. To hope means to be ready at every moment for that which is not yet born, and yet not become desperate if there is no birth in our lifetime. There is no sense in hoping for that which already exists or for that which cannot be. Those whose hope is weak settle down for comfort or for violence; those whose hope is strong see and cherish all signs of new life and are ready every moment to help the birth of that which is ready to be born" (Fromm, 2010, p. 9).

Hannah Arendt, a German thinker of Jewish origin who, in her youth, enjoyed a close personal relationship with Heidegger and Jaspers, occupies a highly original

position in contemporary philosophical thought. While she does not offer a systematic analysis of hope (Hill, 2021; Newman, 2014), it acquires importance in her theory of action, understood as the capacity to initiate something new. The starting point of Arendt's reflections is a critique of modernity. In *The Human Condition* (1958) and other essays written between 1954 and 1960 (Arendt, 1961), this critique is based on the crisis of the stability of the world and its intentionality. According to Arendt, the exasperated production of objects – in Marxian terms (but not in the Marxian sense) the commodification of everything – causes two fundamental effects. First, it is now necessary to consume the objects that *homo faber* constructs (cars, tables, houses, etc.) as if they were food that goes bad unless consumed quickly (Arend's example). Second, things now seem to make themselves, irrespective of human ends (hence the loss of the intentional character of the world). In this continuous flux, it is increasingly difficult for humans to feel at home in the world they have constructed, the great artifice that separates them and almost shelters them from nature, enabling them to live as humans – that is, as beings capable of action and discourse. Arendt observes that without the stability of the world there would be at most the melancholy of Ecclesiastes – of nomadic peoples, those who pass without leaving a trace. The twin themes of action and hope forcefully enter this theoretical context. Seeking a different meaning of modernity, Arendt revives the classical notion of "*praxis*". By distinguishing it from manufacturing (*poiesis*) and linking it to multiple factors such as freedom, plurality, speech, and memory, she gives birth to a conception of politics from which to address questions of meaning and identity originally.

Together with *labour* and *work, action* is one of the three activities that Arendt considers fundamental to defining the human condition: "labor, which corresponds to the biological life of man as an animal; work, which corresponds to the artificial world of objects that human beings build upon the earth; and action, which corresponds to our plurality as distinct individuals." (Arendt, 1958, p. ix). Action is unique in that it brings people together without the mediation of material things. It corresponds to the human condition of plurality, whereby people are unique and different from each other and not "reproductions of the same model". It is also "the" constitutive condition of all political life. Action has two main characteristics: *freedom* and *natality*. Although human beings are conditioned by the real world (starting with the physical and material dimensions), they are also constantly creating their autonomous life conditions. In other words, they can start something new. For Arendt, the capacity to begin something new is rooted in human beings from birth, which itself brings newness to the world: "the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting. In this sense of initiative, an element of action, and therefore of natality, is inherent in all human activities" (Arendt, 1958, p. 9). And it is precisely in this dynamic intrinsic to human life that we can find all the elements that can be linked to hope. As Belardinelli (1990) lucidly sums up, hope is kindled at every new birth and at every new action of which men are capable by their being born. The newcomers bear witness to the fact that the world will continue even after we are gone. Our action, our freedom, and the unpredictability and novelty that action always brings, all tell us that our life in this world is not destined

for routine and decrepitude. "The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, "natural" ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born. Only the full experience of this capacity can bestow upon human affairs faith and hope […]" (Arendt, 1958, p. 247).

Arendt brings up the theme of hope (together with its opposite, fear) also in *The Life of the Mind* (1978). In this last work, she examines the three fundamental faculties of mental/spiritual life (*thinking, willing, judging*).[1] In the second volume *(willing)* she writes: *"*Our psychic apparatus—the soul as distinguished from the mind— is equipped to deal with what comes toward it from this region of the unknown by means of expectation, whose chief modes are hope and fear. The two modes of feeling are intimately connected in that each of them is prone to veer to its seeming opposite, and because of the uncertainties of the region these shiftings are almost automatic. Every hope carries within Itself a fear, and every fear cures itself by turning to the corresponding hope" (Arendt, 1978, vol. II, p. 35). The hope she speaks of is thus a hope that lives in the world and allows for its transformation. For Arendt: "the hope is a worldly category: hope is hope for the renewal of the (old) world made possible in and through political action by the old generation (adults) – a possibility, however, that has its ontological roots in the potentiality for future action embodied in, and represented by, the new generation." (Bergdahl & Langmann, 2021, p. 1).

As we tried to highlight, in all three of these works hope is not just the confident expectation of a future good, but has to do with *action*, with a subjective commitment and responsibility, with a praxis that transforms the present state of affairs. Another aspect they have in common is that they are set in a precise historical moment: the years following the Second World War. Why do three such different authors feel the need to place hope at the centre of their reflection on the human condition? It happens after totalitarianism, the tragedy of World War II, and the horror of the Holocaust – three examples of the dramatic failure of the modern project and its promise of universal human emancipation. But they are also a sign of disillusionment with the consumer society and widespread affluence, whose alienating and contradictory aspects are emerging ever more clearly. In short, in all these processes individuals appear as an irrelevant and fungible variable of economic, administrative, and political systems that overpower and overwhelm them. These works express, in a different but equally "serious" way, a need for rebirth, for a new beginning.

We can put the question in more general sociological terms in this way. For these authors, hope is a dimension that qualifies the very nature of man. Man is action and embodies the tension to desire and create a future that will better realise his possibilities and potential for good. But why does this reflection arise, assert itself with greater force and urgency, or even become possible, at certain times? Which historical subjects carry it forward? This is precisely a sociological perspective within

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[1] The book was published after her death in 1975. Arendt managed to complete the draft only for the first two faculties.

which to understand the theme of hope. Hope is an anthropological principle, but what are the actors, the conditions, and the social contexts for which it is concretely given? In this way, we move from a perspective of philosophical anthropology to a sociological one or, at least, the two perspectives can complement each other.

Hope and Sociology: Traces of a Pathway

In this essay, we do not intend to reconstruct and discuss in detail the various definitions of hope, as this is beyond our scope. We will merely offer some suggestions to develop a brief pathway on the theme of hope in the human and social sciences, without any claim to being systematic.

In any case, it is useful to go back to the origins of the concept because its history helps to shed light on its theoretical structure. The theme of hope is already present in the worldview of the two "cradle cultures" of Western civilisation, Greek culture and Judeo-Christian culture, even if it takes on profoundly different meanings. Greek mythology depicts the role of hope in human affairs through the myth of Pandora's Box narrated by Hesiod (Harrison, 1900). According to the myth, after Prometheus stole fire from the gods, an enraged Zeus gave Pandora (the wife of Prometheus' brother), a vase in which all the evil of the world was sealed. Pandora, with an innate curiosity and instigated by the gods, opened the vase to see its contents and all the evils were released and spread throughout the world. Frightened Pandora hastily closed the vase, leaving only one thing at the bottom: hope. Only at a later moment did Pandora reopen the vase, allowing hope to come out and soothe the evil that has plagued mankind ever since. Hope, then, is the cure for the world's ills, but, as Karl Löwith observes, in the Greek conception it is itself an evil since it induces us to wait for a better future, but it is difficult to give a future that, once real, does not disappoint our expectations. Man's hopes are blind, irrational, deceptive and illusory. Yet mortal man cannot live without this precarious and ambiguous gift from Jupiter. If he were left without hope, he would despair of his situation. In the Greek world, hope is thus a support that helps man endure life, but in essence it is a fatuous fire (Löwith, 1949).

In the Jewish world, hope is based on the "promise of God" since Yahweh presents himself and acts in the history of the Jewish people as the god of promise and deliverance. As Max Weber noted in his profound study on ancient Judaism, *Das antike Judentum* [Ancient Judaism] of 1920 (Love, 2000; Weber, 1920), the Jewish religion is the religion of a "people-pariah", that is, a foreign and host unwelcome people, materially and symbolically segregated from the surrounding socio-cultural context. His faith is based on the "covenant" (berith) that God himself entered into with the people, not as a mere guarantor, but as a real contractor, bound by a mutual commitment and obligation. This covenant, Weber observes, established with the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and then reaffirmed on Sinai before Moses, constituted the foundation of the collective action of the people, of its representation of the world and history, of its legal and political institutions and also of the individual action of the single Jew in every sphere of life. The salvation that is the object of God's promise does not concern individuals, but the entire Jewish people.

Moreover, it does not have to do with the transcendent dimension, but with the concreteness of history. It is the promise that is realised in this world of a land, of an offspring, of liberation from oppressors, of victory over enemies. A victory over enemies that coincides with the victory of Yahweh over the false and lying gods of other peoples. On the memory of this covenant is also founded the charisma of the prophets, who are the "voice" of Yahweh in recalling the ancient promises of the people and announcing the misfortunes for not keeping them, as happened especially during the period of the Babylonian captivity and in the exile, diaspora and persecutions of the following centuries. The theme of the people's hope and expectation, present in the prophetic tradition, is reposed in the figure of the Messiah, the awaited liberator, who becomes central in Christianity: with the coming of Christ, the son of God, in the "fullness of time" (Paul, Gal 4:4), in the kairos favourable for salvation, human history takes on a precise direction. With Christianity, therefore, a new vision of history is affirmed, already present in Judaism, which is no longer the static vision of archaic societies or the circular vision of Greek culture, but a linear and ascending vision. Christ came into the world once and for all, and since then time has taken on another meaning, so that there is no longer any going back, to the previous time.

The Christian vision for which human history is the place where what is "radically new" happens has given rise to two visions and also two traditions of thought on hope, which sometimes oppose each other and sometimes intertwine and overlap. The first is what Löwith (1949) calls the vision of "secularised messianisms". The theme of messianism and God's providential action in history, developed in medieval philosophy from Augustine of Hippo to Joachim of Fiore, has profoundly marked western thought, reappearing in the ideal of progress in modern times. The idea of progress inspired the philosophers of history of the post-Enlightenment era who each identified a "primum mobile", a different dominant factor of socio-historical change and universal renewal (Boudon, 1986/1984). History is aimed at overcoming the present bad condition and walks towards an ever higher and better development thanks to an intrinsic and unstoppable dynamism present in the development of knowledge and science that leads to the affirmation of the "positive spirit" (Comte), in the evolution of the juridical-political structure of society in the direction of freedom (Hegel) and in the economic-social dynamism that leads to the overcoming of the exploitation of man on man and the realisation of absolute justice (Marx).

A second strand, emerging from the same Judeo-Christian tradition, insists on human action and responsibility, on the transformative capacity of the action of individuals, groups and specific historical subjects. From this perspective, hope has been considered a motivational drive for positive action by individuals as well as a positive and industrious expectation, the trust in a successful outcome of a project to which one actively contributes. This perspective, which is found, as we have seen, in different forms in the thinking of Arendt, Bloch and Fromm, is well summarised by Menninger when he observes: "I would see in hope another aspect of the life instinct, the creative drive which wars against dissolution and destructiveness." (1959, p. 483).

After this long introduction, if we go in search of a "theoretical" definition of hope, we necessarily come across a famous passage from one of the most important

texts of early Christianity, the Letter to the Hebrews: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb, chap. 11). This reference appears important not only because this definition precedes all others by many centuries, but because the language of reflection on hope, not only in theology or in thought more directly inspired by Christianity, often retains the mark of this origin. And it also retains the same logical structure. For example, according to the "standard definition" recently proposed by Blöser (2020, p. 62), in the wake of the Enlightenment philosophers' thinking, one can speak of hope when "a person P hopes that X if P desires X and believes X to be possible but not certain". In similar terms, Day, observed that, if we consider *A* to be the subject of hope and a proposition *P* to be the object of hope, "'*A* hopes in some degree that *P*' entails (1) '*A* wishes in some degree that *P*' and (2) '*A* thinks that P is in some degree probable.' These two tests or conditions of the truth of '*A* hopes that *P*' are severally necessary and, it is submitted, jointly sufficient. They may conveniently be called the desiderative and the estimative tests respectively." (1969, p. 98). For Searle: "hope requires uncertainty about whether the hoped for state actually obtains" (1983, p. 32). Bauman's definition is very similar: "hope is valid and real even if groundless, that hope needs no proof—it is the world that needs to prove (and will not!) that it is beyond redemption and salvation. Hope is stronger than all imaginable 'testimony of reality'. Hope is the destiny of humanity, one feature that cannot be defeated" (Bauman, 2004, p. 67).

Synthesising these definitions, we can say that hope contains a tension towards a future – as such – that can only be based on trust in that what is hoped for can be realised. This definition can apply to both the hope that moves individuals to act in a certain way to achieve a specific objective and to the hope that unites different people—or the whole of humanity. It can apply both to a "realistic" hope, which tries to consider most of the factors involved, and to a hope that seems completely unrealistic, bordering on madness. Finally, it can apply both to a hope entirely defined by the world's horizon and to an otherworldly hope. Furthermore, hope has two constitutive conditions: desirability and estimability. Both have a profound sociological significance and directly challenge sociology. Indeed, one always hopes for something s/he values, to which s/he attributes a value (estimative aspect). Hence, always entails values and the existential conceptions that underlie them (Parsons, 1951, ch. 8–9), since they act as a point of reference, a guide for action. At the same time, there is a desire-related aspect. Clyde Kluckhohn (1951) calls values "conceptions of the desirable", i.e., conceptions of what is good, right, and desirable. Values have a mobilising force, they "set us in motion", they are seen as a good to be pursued and for which it is worth striving, working, fighting, and suffering. To sum up, we can say that for these authors hope is essentially characterised by two aspects: a) the temporal dimension projected towards a variously future; b) the presence of "something" that is the object of hope, something that is "worth", to which value is attributed, and that pushes individuals to action to reach or achieve it.

As we can see from the references above, the suggestions that link the theme of hope to the sociological discourse are many. However, the social sciences and sociology have not systematically reflected on hope and analysed it, except for the field of the sociology of religions. We agree, at least in part, with Swedberg when he observes that "Sociologists have paid very little attention to hope, and what they

have said is fragmentary in nature. It would seem that the classics were more interested in hope than modern sociologists have been, even if it never was at the center of their attention. It is also clear that sociologists have mostly seen hope in an empirical rather than a normative way." (2017, p. 37). This condition of the discipline does not prevent us from recalling some studies that focused directly or indirectly on hope and can outline the guidelines of the sociology of hope. The theme of hope is at the centre of a semantic field of concepts that have been, and still are, the object of theory and research for sociology and the human and social sciences: social change, progress, utopia, action, praxis, innovation, emancipation, revolution, values, trust, promise, generations. For this reason, it is worth briefly reviewing the thought of some sociologists (classical and contemporary) in search of the traces of sociology of hope.

If we consider the beginnings of sociology as a science and the concerns accompanying its "founders", we necessarily encounter the figure of Auguste Comte. Hearing Comte's name we are led to think of the "law of the three stages" and the "classification of the sciences", however, as Robert Nisbet sharply points out in his study of the sociological tradition (Nisbet, 1966), a defining theme of his sociology is that of community. In his best-known and most influential work, *Systeme de politique positive* [*System of Positive Policy*], Comte (1875–1877/1851–1854) places at the centre of his social statics (the science of order) and his social dynamics (the science of progress) the project of reconstructing the community, after the traditional forms of association had dissolved under the impact of modernisation and its profound social revolutions. At the centre of this project of universal renewal Comte places the construction of a new moral community. The ghost of the traditional community accompanies his entire sociology, but unlike the conservatives, Comte turns his gaze to the future, since the Enlightenment and the political and industrial revolutions represent for him necessary steps towards the positivist future. If we consider the picture Comte presents of the future positivist society, however, we are not dealing with an industrial-democratic context, but with a re-edition of the Christian-feudal social system deprived of Christianity, since its cohesive factor is no longer the Christian religion, but an altruistic religion based on the cult of Humanity. In *The Catechism of Positive Religion* (1858), Comte introduces for the first time the term "altruism" to denote the collective orientation towards the common good, the new associative spirit that in the future positivist society, which he foresaw, would have to override selfish behaviour, a bad inheritance of humanity's unfinished history.

Even Marx, like Comte, on the one hand, appears as the *social scientist* analysing society and social change and, on the other hand, is the *prophet* bearer of an ideal of social liberation. Marx is not only an important social theorist but should be remembered in this context also because his thought inspired many social and political movements up to the present day. According to Marx, to liberate man, allowing him to develop his full potential, it is necessary to liberate labour from the "curse" of property. Hope in the Marxian perspective is, therefore, essentially linked to the liberation of human labour. If labour is the human essence, man can only be liberated and free himself by liberating labour. Another aspect of Marx's sociology linked to the theme of hope is his critique of religion, considered as a *false hope* or, rather, a false response to the hope of human emancipation.

Religion fulfils the *ideological function* of distracting and diverting people from solving the real problems of society by pointing to an (imaginary) afterlife in which all injustices will finally be healed and overcome. In Marx's theoretical framework, true hope coincides with the primacy of action, of praxis, within a project of liberation (of labour) of human beings.

In Émile Durkheim, the theme of hope is connected to that of happiness and its social conditions. In *The Division of Labor in Society* (1960/1893) Durkheim does not exclude a link between hope (or rather the disposition of optimism) and the instinct of preservation; however, consistent with his more general sociological approach, hope is considered essentially a normative product or a social "fact" (Neves, 2003). According to the French sociologist, the reason why individuals can be hopeful is that they believe that things will turn out well in the end. The following quote make this clear:

> "The only experimental fact proving that life is generally good is that the great mass of men prefer it to death. To be so, in the average life, happiness must prevail over unhappiness. If the relations were reversed, neither the attachment of men to life, nor its continuance jostled by the facts at each moment, could be understood. Pessimists, it is true, explain the persistence of this phenomenon by the illusions of hope. According to them, if, in spite of the deceptions of experience, we hold on to life, it is because we are wrongly hoping that the future will make up for the past. But even admitting that hope is sufficient to explain the love of life, it does not explain itself. It has not miraculously descended from heaven into our hearts, but it has had to be formed, as all sentiments, within the action of the facts. If, then, men have learned to hope, if, under a blow of misfortune, they have acquired the habit of turning their eyes toward the future, and of awaiting compensations for their present sufferings, it is because they see that these compensations are frequent, that the human organism is at once too supple and too resistant to be easily beaten into despondency, that the moments won by misfortune were exceptional, and that, generally, the balance ended by returning to its former state" (Durkheim, 1960/1893, pp. 245–246).

Hope is a collective feeling learned by individuals through time and experience and "persists" to the extent that society "nurtures" and cultivates it as a resource for people during testing times.

Significant links between hope/despair and suicide can also be discerned in his discussion of the aetiology of suicide. Egoistic suicide results from a lack of integration of the individual into society or particular social groups, so it is typical for those who feel lonely and isolated and place no hope in their social relationships. The case of anomic suicide is quite different. In Durkheim's analysis, this form of suicide constitutes a risk for both those overwhelmed by sudden ruin and those blessed with unexpected good fortune. It emerges during a harsh economic depression as well as in periods of sudden and accelerated economic growth. In a static society, individuals have limited aspirations and know what goals they can realistically pursue: they can be somehow "happy" even in poverty. In a fast-moving society, instead, the values and norms that regulate behaviour and define

"what one can hope for" fluctuate: individuals find themselves profoundly disoriented, prey to their unlimited desires, with no moral and normative safety net. Anomic suicide is the act of someone who is the prey and victim of disordered and exaggerated hope, of desires that overwhelm the criteria and norms by which they can calmly direct their life.

This anthropological vision, which is found throughout Durkheim's work, is clearly presented in a short essay that constitutes the French sociologist's last published scientific work, *Le dualisme de la nature humaine et ses conditions sociales* [The Dualism of Human Nature and Its Social Conditions]. In this work Durkheim (2005/1914) notes that man is *homo duplex*, in the sense that his inner life has a dual centre of gravity. Man is a restless and dissatisfied being because he feels this dualism within himself, the division between his individual being and his social being. We are the theatre of a struggle. On the one hand, there are our individual passions, inclinations, desires and "selfish tendencies", and on the other hand, the "rules of morality" and norms drawn up by society. These values and norms, originally external as "things", are internalised, become a part of us. And it is these values and norms that, according to Durkheim, make us truly "human", allow us to enter into communication with others and "save" us from ourselves and our instincts and passions. The beliefs and practices to which any society and civilisation has attached the greatest importance were and are intended not to suppress this radical dualism, but to mitigate its consequences. However, with the progress of knowledge and science, with the increase in the division of labour and its productivity, with the improvement of living conditions from a material point of view, man's restlessness does not diminish, but rather becomes ever greater. Religions are a significant indicator of this: while the rudimentary cults of primitive societies exude a feeling of confidence and joy, the great religions of modern peoples give us an image of man as a tormented and suffering being. Social and economic development by no means guarantees greater human happiness (Giddens, 1978).

Unlike Marx and Durkheim, who tend to explain individual action from general social structures, for Weber, sociology is concerned with understanding the action of individuals. We find the theme of hope also in his theoretical framework. We can find references to hope in at least four of Weber's main theories: the typology of social action, the typology of power, the two types of ethics and, finally, the theory of the religious determinants of the birth of capitalism.

In Weber's typology of social action, both goal-rational action and value-rational action are oriented towards the future: the former because it finalises the means employed to the ends pursued (it is a "rational" hope); the latter because it is driven by the pursuit of religious, ethical or aesthetic values perceived as "goods in themselves" whose pursuit gives meaning to life (it is a hope driven by absolute values). This orientation towards the future can also be found in the two forms of ethics – ethics of responsibility and ethics of intention – which are closely linked to these two forms of the rationality of action.

In the discussion of forms of legitimate power (authority), the type most intimately connected with hope is charismatic power, based on a quality considered extraordinary (Weber, 1968/1921). The charismatic leader gives hope to his followers and points to a goal, offering his person and credibility as a guarantee. Unlike traditional and legal-rational power, which are ordinary and routine, charismatic power is an extraordinary, exceptional power, full of *hope* and *promise*; it disrupts

the customs of ordinary social and political life. For this very reason, charismatic power, when it prevails, produces radical changes and "leaps" in history, whereby it can radically overturn established social and cultural arrangements. Indeed, Weber notes that charisma is "the great revolutionary force" (1968, p. 245). As Freund (1968) rightly comments, what matters in the case of charismatic power is not stability, but movement, and even upheaval. The charismatic notion, as Weber himself put it, is the "epiphany" of itself.

In his writings on the sociology of religion, on the one hand, he treats hope much as Marx and Durkheim did, speaking of "hope for compensation" and "hope for salvation" (Weber, 1946, p. 103 and 273) as the motivation that leads members of the lower classes to turn to religious practice. On the other hand, Weber offers an entirely original idea when he makes orientation towards the future a factor that intervenes decisively in the emergence of capitalism from a religious matrix. Among the factors that contributed to the birth and development of early capitalism, particularly important is what Weber calls the "spirit of capitalism" [*Geist des Kapitalismus*], that is, a set of attitudes and values that referred to economic activity and were linked to a more general conception of human action and experience, the roots of which Weber finds in Calvinist Protestantism. The spirit of capitalism highly values economic action per se. It is not a mere necessity (one must work to live) nor a mere means to other ends (wealth and well-being), but a value in itself, something that fulfils man. Profits, i.e., the gain from economic activity, must not be wasted or squandered, nor simply piled up unproductively, nor risked imprudently and rashly, but must be invested and re-invested endlessly in a "rational", far-sighted, and prudent way so that it can grow even more. Finally, as far as the vision of time is concerned, the spirit of capitalism is constantly directed toward the future: this implies the renunciation of immediate satisfaction today to have more tomorrow; anti-traditionalism and hostility towards every constraint that comes from the past; the spirit of innovation and openness to the new (Poggi, 1983). We can argue that hope and projection towards the future is a theme that essentially qualifies the spirit of early capitalism (unlike today when capitalism appears as a self-reproducing system thanks to its internal logic).

Between this generation of "classical" sociologists and the following one, there is a figure who deserves to be remembered because he almost acts as a ferryman towards contemporaneity: Karl Mannheim. Considered the founder of the sociology of knowledge, Mannheim wanted to overcome the partial, particular, and evaluative conception of ideology formulated by Marx by proposing a *non-evaluative, general* (all statements are ideological) and *total* (sociological critique of form and content) conception of ideology. The unmasking of ideology does not stem from an absolute distinction between "truth" and "lies", but from an awareness of "relationalism" whereby all views of reality must be placed in the socio-cultural contexts in which they develop. Mannheim also introduced the famous dichotomy ideology/utopia (1954/1929) to identify the "point of view" of those who defend the interests of the dominant classes (ideology) vs those who propose a radical change in the existing social order in favour of the subordinate classes (utopia). Without delving into the theoretical difficulties of this conceptual pair, we can say that utopia differs from ideology for its "transcendent" character in that it directs conduct towards elements

that reality does not contain (yet) and is aimed at transforming the existing order. Mannheim reiterates that utopia is partial, being a socially conditioned thought, but it has the merit of grasping the dynamic character of the social–historical reality and its continuous transformation, something that escapes the perspective of those who defend the status quo. Marx gave the term utopia a negative meaning of abstract and unfounded hope, contrasting it with his project of scientific socialism, the authentic interpreter of historical laws. Mannheim, instead, sees in utopia the perspective of the "not yet", a project aimed at unhinging the existing and depriving the ruling class of its ideological support. Utopia is a premature truth, *in the form of hope*. Not a project that *cannot* be realised, but a project that is *not yet* realised. The risk and, at the same time, the dramatic character of the confrontation between ideologies and utopias is that when the latter reach their goal they tend to become, in turn, ideologies.

This happens because every social–historical subject who is the bearer of a utopia expresses a situated and partial point of view, therefore, it is not able to maintain the promise of universality that moves its original dynamism. Mannheim believes that the possibility of getting out of this contradiction could lie in a subject "occupying a middle position" and not ascribable – because of its particular characteristics – to one of the struggling classes: the "socially unattached intelligentsia" [*freischwebende Intelligenz*], composed of people who, thanks to education, can reach a critical awareness of the socio-historical situation in its complexity (Mannehiem, 1954, pp. 137–138). Here the analytical discourse – i.e., the real possibility of "uncoupling" intellectuals from any class affiliation – is combined with a deontological discourse: according to Mannheim, intellectuals should take on a civil and political commitment without falling prey to particularism, sectarianism, and factionalism. This does not always happen, so much so that intellectuals have often been accused of "betrayal" for their choice of social disengagement or because they have fanatically and factiously embraced the theses of one of the social partners in the struggle. In *Freedom, Power, and Democratic Planning* (1950) this idea is translated into a meritocratic educational project and the hope that the faculties of rational analysis will be extended, through an adequate system of education, to all members of society.

Modern sociology of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries appears even more fragmented than the "classics" and seems to prefer concepts that are somehow linked to the concept of hope (love, trust, solidarity, imagination, etc.), rather than focusing on this concept. An example in this sense is the Russian-American sociologist Pitirim A. Sorokin who in his book *The Reconstruction of Humanity* (1948) tried to outline how individuals could emerge from the great uncertainty caused by the crisis following the Second World War. He attributed the disintegration of solidaristic bonds to the incidence of the exaggerated individualism of the cultural sensate mentality, which could have led to the destruction of humanity if ways had not been taken to counter it. Sorokin, in summarising the remedies for resolving the crisis in the sensate society, argues that the main reason for man's impotence in being creatively altruistic is the neglect of these phenomena by the social sciences during the last four centuries. In Sorokin, therefore, confidence in the potential of the social sciences as guides for mankind is affirmed, so much so that he even hypothesised the birth of a

new applied science—amitology (Sorokin, 1951)—dealing specifically with the promotion of friendship, unconditional love and mutual aid. Sorokin produced a body of knowledge for the study of altruism and love (1954) that also deserves attention because he did not refer to a "sociological humanism" but to a kind of sociology that aimed to try to transform the way human beings interact by orienting them towards the bond defined as love relationship and that characterises a free, harmonious, humanistic and creative society. It was the forerunner of that "positive sociology"— by analogy with "positive psychology" (Nichols, 2005, 2012)—which between the end of the last century and the beginning of the third millennium turned into "humanistic sociology" (Berger, 1963; Goodwin, 2003; Lee, 1973, 1978), making precisely a sociology of hope possible.

Among contemporaries, we can find a more explicit and in-depth approach to the theme of hope in the works of Peter L. Berger, one of the most influential sociologists of the end of the twentieth century – e.g., his seminal work on *The Social Construction of Reality* (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) – and probably the greatest sociologist of religions. Hope is sometimes addressed directly, as in *A Rumors of Angels* (2011/1969) or *Questions of Faith* (2003), and sometimes evoked indirectly, but just as suggestively, as in the essay on the comic dimension of human experience (Berger, 1997).

The starting point for our analysis of hope is *A Rumors of Angels*, a "provocative and controversial" work (Caspar, 1981, p. 139). We believe that considering it as pertaining only to the sociology of religion would be reductive since its scope is a reflection merging philosophical anthropology and sociology of culture. In the third chapter, Berger proposes to indicate some "prototypical human gestures […] that may be seen as signals of transcendence" (Berger, 2011, p. 57 and 76). By which he means "certain reiterated acts and experiences that appear to express essential aspects of man's being" (Berger, 2011, p. 58) in which man manifests the need to overcome his immediate condition, the normality and routine of everyday life and, ultimately, the limited nature of the human condition, with its inexorable horizon of finiteness and death, to open up to something that bears the sign of transcendence.

Without any claim to the exhaustiveness of his classification, Berger presents five prototypical human gestures as signals of transcendence.[2] Of these experiences, our interest focuses on hope, the quality of "futurity" in human existence:

"Human existence is always oriented toward the future. […]. An essential dimension of this "futurity" of man is hope. It is through hope that men overcome the difficulties of any given here and now. And it is through hope that men find meaning in the face of extreme suffering. A key ingredient of most (but not all) theodicies is hope. The specific content of such hope varies. In earlier periods of human history, when the concept of the individual

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[2] These five gestures are: 1) *the propensity for order*, *i.e.,* man's inclination for order or trust in reality; 2) *the play* – whether playful or painful – that establishes a temporal structure that "suspends" the rules and logic of everyday life; 3) *the hope,* which is that quality of human existence that directs our gaze towards the future; 4) the *damnation*, which drives us to seek justice, punish who commits evil deeds and "compensate" the victims; 5) the *humor,* which allows us to recognise the discrepancy between man and the world, putting life into perspective.

and his unique worth was not as yet so sharply defined, this hope was commonly invested in the future of the group. […]. Under the impact of secularization, ideologies of this worldly hope have come to the fore as theodicies (the Marxist one being the most important of late). In any case, human hope has always asserted itself most intensely in the face of experiences that seemed to spell utter defeat, most intensely of all in the face of the final defeat of death" (Berger, 2011, p. 66).

For Berger, hope is transcendent because it implies the ultimate rejection of finiteness and death as something unjust and unnatural, transferring it to the passion for life and the projection towards the future.

Crucial in Berger's reasoning is the idea of the possible benefits (moral and political) achieved by placing human existence in a "perspective" view of life and the world, freeing man from the danger of absolutizing the current reality and its idols.

The last author to consider in our reconstruction is Henri Desroche. He wrote an essay on *The Sociology of Hope* (1979/1973), followed a few years later by a wide-ranging study on the "cooperative project" (Desroche, 1976). In the latter, he analyses how the hope that animates men can be translated into the action of communities and associations capable of generating "from below" concrete economic-social enterprises based on the principles of self-help and mutual help.

Referring to the work of Bloch, Mannheim, and Gramsci, Desroche proposes a typology of the forms and dimensions of hope, perhaps not always completely clear and convincing, but rich in suggestions and ideas. One aspect that characterises Desroche's work is the extensive use of images and metaphors, an appropriate discursive strategy when talking about an object (namely hope and its realisations in history) that is difficult to frame in simple and linear Cartesian categories. Instead of establishing a sort of comparative axiology in which realities and historical experiences that can be considered concrete and realised hopes are contrasted with others that are classified as empty and illusory hopes, Desroche prefers to speak of peaks and troughs, two metaphors that distinguish all hope: "not fulfilled or hollow hopes, but the peaks and troughs of all hope" (p. 9). Indeed, he believes that in concrete historical experiences, "the peaks and the throughs are difficult to separate" (p.26).

In the first chapter, Desroche distinguishes four significant forms of hope: hope as a waking dream; as a collective ideation; as exuberant expectation; and as a generalized utopia.

1. Hope can first be "a waking dream" or "*the dream of an awakened man*" (p. 12), as some Greek philosophers suggested. In this sense, dream and reality are not antithetical and mutually exclusive terms. Sometimes the border between the two is indistinct and their distance very narrow. "There are dreams that precede, announce, command and finally constitute a reality that, without them, would only have been a latent possibility" (p. 13). This is true for individuals but also in the case of social dreams. Dreams illuminate, guide, and prepare concrete realisations. Even talking about a dream introduces it into the realm of the possible and realisable. One could claim a "social function" of the dream (p. 15), in the sense that it can generate a "culture", a mentality aimed at believing it possible and committing oneself to the realisation of what one has dreamed. 2. Hope can also be seen as "a collective ideation". Desroche embraces Durkheim's idea that religion

not only explains the world but is a force that helps people live and drives them to action (Durkheim, 1995/1912). More generally, Desroche refers to the mobilising force of collective beliefs and ideals that "have the power to move mountains". 3. Thirdly, following Mauss (1950/1902–1938) hope can be conceived as an "exuberant expectation". The main concept here is that of desire, which Desroche distinguishes between the aspiration or expectation of a desirable ideal and the anticipation of its possible realisation, which implies the involvement of the will and the capacity for action. It is the dialectic between what should be done to respond to the subjective requirement of desire (of what is imagined) and what must be done to respond to the objective framework of power. Desroche finds this same dialectic in Marxism. 4. Finally, hope can take the form of "a generalized utopia". Desroche takes his cue from Gramsci's rejection of the clear-cut opposition between utopian socialism and scientific socialism, proudly claimed by Marx (Gramsci, 1999). As he will show in his work on cooperative projects, Desroche (1976) assigns great significance to attempts at social experiments – utopian realisations in which to creatively imagine new forms of social and productive relations in the light of a spirit of solidarity and fraternity played out in a concrete earthly project. Commenting on this position, Desroche asks: "Are not utopia and hope twin sisters? In utopia there is the hope of a different society. In hope there is the utopia of a different world. In both of them there is the strategy of alterity. Between both of them, the dividing line is very fine: the utopian society has its religious traces; the world of hope has its tattersall implications" (1979, p. 23).

If these are the sociological "peaks" of hope, its "troughs" describe, instead, the aspects of non-fulfilment, risk, imperfection and even betrayal, which prevent the realisation of what is hoped for. Desroche defines them as failed hope, empty hope, trapped hope and unhoped for hope. They too are always present and ineradicable in the concrete attempts that people make.

1. *Failed hope* arises when efforts to overthrow and replace an unjust state of affairs simply lead to the replacement of one oppressive regime by another. Often revolutions do not produce the well-being of the dominated social groups, but the advent of a new elite that replaces the one just overthrown, as per the disenchanted vision of the neo-Machiavellian sociologists (Mosca, Pareto, Michels). 2. *Empty hope* is instead the failure of collective exaltation. As Durkheim points out in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, it is an exceptional and ephemeral state, which appears, for example, in particular ritual moments but is then supplanted by the normality and routine of "profane" activities. Not to be emptied by an ephemeral and transient exaltation, hope must be continually nourished, it must be "consolidated" in the collective memory (as an "echo") and the collective conscience (as a "viaticum") to sustain the ideal impulse, ensuring its continuity and persistence over time. 3. *Trapped hope* occurs when the hope for a future and better state of affairs does not translate into a desire for general transformation, but into the search for an "elsewhere" with no real prospects for change. This ends up translating into acceptance of the world as it is, in a form of alienation with no prospects. According to Desroche, this "entrapment" can take on three different forms of "alterity": the evasion or escapism, which creates "happy islands", such as the artificial paradises offered by drugs; the carving out within the dominant society of closed "micro-societies of opposition" with their own rules and alternative lifestyles; even if the opposition seizes power, "its very expectation is contaminated by its attainment […] it is the unhappy hour for upstarts and

arrivistes" (pp. 33–38). 4. The last is the *unhoped-for hope*, which Desroche defines as a mirage that cannot be attained: "hope is a promise that cannot be kept" (p. 38). In this sense, hope can produce a doubly unhoped-for effect: "it does not get what it hopes for, and it does get what it did not hope for" (p. 40). At the end of the search, the commitment, and the struggle, one finds something quite different from what one had been looking for: for example, a utopia of radical religious renewal can lead to the foundation of a new church or a new state. Desroche concludes his description of this last constitutive ambivalence of hope with the metaphor of a fountain: "hope presents itself as a surge of creativity: the jet rises and rises, but its grace in flight has as a price the weight of the droplets that tend to fall down. And yet, conversely, this falling is ceaselessly countered by the ascending force of the jet" (p. 40). This constitutive dialectic between ideal and practical realisation (often inadequate) allows Desroche to consider hope no longer as an abstract illusion or unattainable dream but as a mobilising force that leads to social reconstruction, with all the possibilities and risks that every social construction entails.

Forms and Dimensions of Hope

We now believe that our small contribution to a sociology of hope could be to represent its dynamics utilizing a grid of five pairs of dichotomous categories, which collect and synthesise some of the results of the discussion and debate on this issue in the human and social sciences.

Individual Hope and Collective Hope Strictly speaking, hoping can only be an individual act (Pieper, 2020/1967, pp. 60–61). However, from a sociological perspective, one cannot fail to note that "Not only does the individual live by hope. Nations and social classes live through hope, faith, and fortitude, and if they lose this potential they disappear—either by their lack of vitality or by the irrational destructiveness which they develop." (Fromm, 2010, p. 21).

To say that groups, classes, or societies live on hope is not to attribute them a supra-individual life of their own. It is, instead, to recognise that within these groups and social formations are systems of relationships that can strengthen (or depress) individual hope, giving it a particular direction and energy. For example, if we think of a family, we think of a *sui generis* reality beyond the simple sum of the people who make it up (Donati & Archer, 2015). And so, if we say that "a family hopes to improve its living conditions", we are not simply indicating the sum of the individual hopes of its members, but a relationship in which people influence each other, encourage each other, plan their future together, look to one or more members as capable of setting goals or supporting the weaker ones, share tasks and efforts to better pursue their goals, etc. This fact is most evident in the case of the family, i.e., a primary social group in which people are strongly involved with one another, but it can apply, in different forms, to any form of group or human association. One point worth reflecting on is the mechanisms of imitation, emulation, reinforcement, and mutual support, which "make it easier to hope" *together* and remain in an active determination.

Hope for the Future or the Past A second distinction is whether hope is directed towards the future (as is more immediately apparent) or, instead, towards the past. Hope can be directed toward a new state of affairs or look back to a previous ideal condition. In behaviourist psychology, French (1952, p. 50) distinguishes between a hope based on opportunities for satisfaction (desired fulfilment) and one based on memories of previous satisfaction (representation of satisfaction).

In sociology, this possibility has been the object of systematic analysis by Mannheim (1954). He places conservative utopias, which idealise the past and want to restore it, alongside forms of future-oriented utopia (such as the millenarianism of the Anabaptists and the Protestant sects in the early modern age, liberal utopia, and socialist utopia).

Such a perspective goes back to the image of the golden age of Hesiod and Ovid in which man's ideal condition, the land of happiness free of all disappointments and contradictions, does not belong to the future, but an ahistorical and mythical past. In modern philosophy, this position was expressed by Rousseau (2014/1782), who argued that "man is naturally good" but civilisation produced an evil "second nature" that takes over and colonises the original innocence of the primitive state of nature. Freud's idea, expressed in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, (1930) is similar, but his conclusions appear to be quite opposite. The father of psychoanalysis admits that civilization is built on drive renunciation but believes society's moral structures, prohibitions, and norms that keep man's aggressive and appropriative nature in check (specifically in the sexual sphere, but also in that of wealth and power) to be a necessary evil.

Finally, it should be remembered that the future is not necessarily full of hope and the promise of a better life: it can be threatening, dark, and full of uncertainty and fear. For example, on a personal or micro-social level, the situation of the chronically or terminally ill, or those suffering from degenerative diseases. Or we can think of old age in which the future necessarily leads to a weakening of the capacities and faculties of thought and action. On a macro-social level, there are periods of growth and economic, demographic, and democratic optimism (such as the post-war period in Europe) and periods of decadence and pessimism, in which the future is viewed with fear and a sense of precariousness and uncertainty. In this regard, a recent study (Benasayag & Schmit, 2006) has documented the profound malaise of our era. Based on their work as psychotherapists, the authors observed that depression, a condition of life neither desire nor hope, affects today many people, especially young people, for whom "everything is already known" and nothing interests or intrigues.

Hope and Fear What some see as an object of hope, others may see with fear. What represents a promise for some is a threat for others. The same events may be perceived and expected differently depending on the social position. For instance, in the Triumphs of Death or the Dances of Death, which characterised many pictorial cycles between the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Modern Age in Northern and Central Europe, death is seen as a condemnation and a terrible deprivation for those who had wealth and power in this world, while it is seen with hope and consolation by the poor and the marginalised. The same is true of all

revolutionary historical events that lead to a radical overturning of social hierarchies and existing social stratification. This emerges clearly from Crane Brinton's (1952) study of the antecedents and unfolding of four great upheavals: the English (1640–1649), French, American and Soviet revolutions. These four revolutions were produced not in decadent societies, or those under crisis, but on the contrary in societies that were experiencing a certain degree of development and prosperity. They were not a reaction to despair and misery but rather the result of a sense of dissatisfaction, impatience, and even hope, caused by frustrated aspirations, unsatisfied desires, and constraints that were deemed intolerable. The old ruling class, or at least part of it, began to fall prey to fear, to lose confidence in itself, its authority, and the qualities on which its strength and power had traditionally been based. Thus, part of the old ruling class converted fear into a new hope, joining with the revolutionary movement. In considering this hope/fear duality, we can bring two very recent facts as our last example. Trump's electoral promise to build a wall on the border with Mexico was greeted with hope and favour by those who feared uncontrolled immigration from Latin America, while it appeared as a threat that frustrated the hope of a better life for the immigrants themselves and for those who supported their rights. Again, in the recent conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the possibility of receiving military aid from Western countries has fuelled the Ukrainians' hope of resisting the Russian invasion, while reducing the Russians' hope of military success.

Realistic Hope and Illusory (or Utopian) Hope Another important, but also complex and controversial distinction is the opposition between realistic hope and illusory or utopian hope. This issue was raised in an interesting lecture by Ralf Dahrendorf, held on 24 February 1976 at the University of Manchester, entitled *Inequality, Hope, and Progress*, in which the German sociologist attempts to transform hope into a useful empirical concept (Swedberg, 2017). To this end, Dahrendorf distinguishes "utopian hope" from "realistic hope". He derives the first term from Marx and the Frankfurt School, particularly Marcuse and Habermas. Utopian hope can be a powerful factor for change, even if Dahrendorf does not specify well in what terms. Conversely, realistic hope is based on experience and what is possible (achievable) and relates precisely to the reality of the conditions to which one aspires. Hence also Swedberg's designation of "effective hope" (2017). As a conflictualist, Dahrendorf argues that social inequality is a motivation for individuals to improve their condition by awakening realistic or effective hope. The reason why realistic hope is also effective hope is that it constitutes a very practical type of hope, ready to be translated into reality. This hope "motivates people to change their conditions, or their lives, in a variety of ways […]. It may be a challenge for solitary action, in associations, trade unions, political groups, […]. Whether every change brought about under social conditions in which action is sparked off by realistic hope is progress, may be open to doubt; but if there is to be any progress at all, such hope is one of its ingredients" (Dahrendorf, 1976, p. 14). Dahrendorf reiterated these latter aspects a few years later: "Inequality can be a source of hope and progress in an environment which is sufficiently open to enable people to make good and improve their life chances by their own efforts" (Dahrendorf, 1995, p. 9). This theme shows significant similarities with the reflection on *promises* in the context of the analysis of

performative acts by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). These kinds of linguistic acts do not aim to describe and represent what happens in the world but to *make events happen* and *transform reality*.

Promises are inherently risky acts, which expose those who make them to the possibility of failure and discredit. On the one hand, they require the *intention* and *willingness* of the subject to keep the promises; on the other hand, the *plausibility* of the promises themselves is crucial. Unlike news or testimony, a promise is not simply *true* or *false*, but *valid* or *invalid*. Its "strength" does not simply depend on the intention of the person making it but on its possibility of being realised, of producing real consequences and changes. It is important to carefully consider the "realistic" aspect of the promise (for example, a politician cannot promise that everyone will live to be 120). We can offer a "serious" promise only on what we have an effective power of *action, implementation, or interdiction*.

In the light of these considerations, we believe that the distinction between realistic and illusory hopes is very useful insofar as it indicates polarity in the perspectives of human intention and action, but it cannot be absolutized. Realism is given, *à la* Weber, by the correspondence between ends and means, by the ability, at least subjectively, to calculate costs and benefits, the plurality of factors involved, and the intervening variables. But very often hope – and the very capacity for action– is measured not by the means and their availability, but by the value and desirability of the ends. Moreover, what is illusory or realistic is not always definable a priori, but only a posteriori. Many times, it is only a posteriori that we can say whether something was sensible and realistic. It is not always easy to distinguish between what is realistic and unrealistic, acceptable, or completely illusory. In addition to the objective, conditional, and environmental factors that are never totally calculable (for example, the sudden change in weather conditions during a battle), there is also always an element that cannot be defined a priori: the motivation or, in other words, the faith, the will, the determination of those who want to achieve a certain objective, to make the impossible become possible. In the famous battle of Agincourt (1415), narrated in Shakespeare's Henry V and made into a beautiful film by Kenneth Branagh, the English king faced the powerful French nobles with a poorly armed handful of men (therefore, in Weberian terms, with totally inadequate means). His hope of victory being abysmal given the forces on the field, his attempt appears entirely reckless, doomed to certain failure. In terms of mathematical statistics (of "mathematical hope", which calculates probability), one might say that his attempt was a pure gamble. Yet in the end, Henry prevails, and with little human loss. Of course, it could be repeated, but that is very rare. But it can happen.

To understand this sociologically, we can refer to Goffman's reflection in *Where the Action Is* (1967), an original essay dedicated to gambling and "fateful circumstances", that is, that type of actions and situations whose outcome is particularly open, uncertain, risky. One can either yield to fatefulness or try to prevent or "manage" it, as far as possible, through attention, vigilance, preparation, and care. Some character traits are better suited to support fatefulness, risk, and at the same time to allow as much "control" as possible over fateful events. There are also adaptations, protections, and strategies to defend against fatefulness— which, however, can never be avoided or exorcised completely. Conversely, there

are measures of "defensive indeterminism" (that's how it happened, it's nobody's fault).

Short-range and Long-range Hope The concept of hope is closely (intrinsically) linked to the theme of waiting. This waiting – which can be active and industrious or not – can refer to a near, immediate, well-defined future, or a more distant, wider, more open, and perhaps indeterminate future.

In this regard, in the wake of Bergson's philosophy of lived time, Eugène Minkowski (1970), a leading exponent of phenomenological psychiatry, observes that there are two different ways in which the subject can refer to the future: the present-future direction (activity) and the future-present direction (expectation). The future is linked to desire and hope, both of which allow us to go beyond the present by widening our gaze and existential perspective. Stopping at the present or the near future means stopping at our current "being" and "having", resting in the satisfaction of what we created. On the other hand, living in the perspective of expectation (future-present) means escaping from the imposition of the present and looking freely far into the lived space that opens up before each of us.

In psycho-social terms, as part of a vast comparative research project on the value dilemmas that characterise different cultures, Geert Hofstede (2001, 2011) has drawn attention to the distinction between *short-term* and *long-term orientation*. This distinction can be referred to the values and actions of individuals, groups, and entire societies and cultures. Short-term orientation focuses essentially on the present and its most immediate possibilities and considers it more important than the future. It values immediate gratification over long-term, deferred satisfaction. Societies with a long-term orientation, on the other hand, look further ahead, seeing the future as a real dimension to be reckoned with. The long-term orientation focuses on a future good or benefit for which one is willing to postpone immediate, short-term gratification for the sake of greater future benefit. The latter cultural perspective values perseverance, saving, sacrifice and adaptability.

Alongside these two polarities in the attitude towards time and the future, there is a third perspective, which represents a sort of "leap" from the previous ones, and which can be found in the reflections of authors who are very different from each other. Here the fundamental relationship is no longer simply that between present and future, but that between present and transcendence, understood in both the *historical* and *eschatological* sense. This is "another dimension", a horizon that lies beyond the human capacity to wait and plan and, even before that, to understand the future. This perspective always starts by observing the "power of the negative", the "evil of the world", and the "defeat of man", which sometimes emerge with force, as in the case of catastrophes, wars, or plagues. It is the great theme of a "sociology of evil" and, at the same time, of a "radical hope" or an "eschatology" that seems to emerge most strongly in the face of the "cultural trauma" caused by tragic events such as the Holocaust or the attack on the Twin Towers (Alexander, 2002). But it also finds its expression when faced with private dramas, such as the death of a child and, in general, when faced with the suffering and pain of the innocent. It is the dizzying hope that evil, suffering,

injustice, innocent and forgotten pain can find meaning, answers, and justice. That every lie and every wrong will be revealed and judged, and that persecutors can be made to face the horror of their actions and their consequences. *It is a hope that belongs to the horizon of history, but which seems to go beyond this horizon.* It is interesting to note how this ultimate question reappears in the background of the reflections of very different authors. In the last chapter of his most controversial work, *On Aggression* (1966), Konrad Lorenz makes a "profession of hope". At the end of the book, after having amply described the many forms in which the aggressive instinct innate in man manifests itself and having feared the danger of the total destruction of mankind constituted by nuclear weapons, the great ethologist asks whether and how this instinct can in some way be tamed. After reviewing various measures and strategies that can at least partially contain aggression (starting with education, art, science, beauty, truth, humanistic ideals), he concludes that a definitive answer can only be offered by biological evolution, "the great constructor", through the mechanisms of selection and mutation. Thus projecting this hope into the long time of evolutionary change, Lorenz believes that reason, friendship and solidarity between people of all nations and ideologies will be able to mark the future destiny of humanity: "I believe that this, in the not too distant future, will endow our descendants with the faculty of fulfilling the greatest and most beautiful of all commandments" (p. 299). Even Richard Rorty, at the end of a long theoretical journey, pointed to hope as the true glue of society. Each of us has own private vocabulary, which would in itself be incommensurable with that of others. So how do we live together? For a long time Rorty has pointed to the word "solidarity" as the horizon of cooperation, so that we accept to have a public and shared vocabulary alongside the private one. In the last phase of his life, he identified in the term "hope" the necessary declination to the future of this solidarity. Without hope, which is only a future horizon, present life, even that which can be built on solidarity, cannot stand. For this reason, at the end of *Philosophy and Social Hope* (1999), which brings together various essays dealing with this theme, Rorty evokes the idea of hope as the problematic but unavoidable horizon within which to think about human history: "The utopian social hope which sprang up in nineteenth-century Europe is still the noblest imaginative creation of which we have record" (p. 277). If Lorenz and Rorty speak of a utopian dimension of hope, which remains within an entirely worldly horizon, for other authors the possibility of a real "repair of the world", coincides with the redemptive action of God (Berger, 2003). As Löwith (1949) reminds us, there is an experience of pain and evil produced by historical action that desperately calls for an answer that makes sense of humanity's actions and suffering. Expressing the attitude of the religious man in the face of this question, America's greatest Protestant theologian, Niebuhr, responds: "Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime; therefore, we must be saved by hope." (2008, p. 63).

This same theme is also present in the reflections of two Marxist authors of Jewish origin, Horkheimer and Adorno, who seem to sum up the dramas of the twentieth century. Adorno (1981) wonders whether there can be a justice that can annul both present and past sufferings; Horkheimer (1970) replies that in the face of the evil of the world and the demand for justice it is impossible to believe in the

existence of an omnipotent and good God. However, theology does not grant injustice the last word because it generates the hope for a positive absolute. Finally, Peter L. Berger (1997), in his original essay on laughter and the comic dimension of existence, links the theme of hope to the overturning of the conceptual pair reality-illusion, reality-appearance, of which the comic can be considered a sort of perturbation, a fleeting opening, an omen. The comic represents a suspension of everyday life – with its routines, boredom, and sufferings – and offers glimpses towards a reality that "transcends" everyday life and the given-for-granted world.

Outlines of a Research Programme

As Desroche points out, there are "thousand and one hopes that can and should be confronted, a thousand and one systems of forces are expressed in a thousand and one languages" (1979, p. 25). The humanities and social sciences analyse hope each within a specific cognitive perspective and with their method of analysis. History aims at describing and understanding particular and unique acts and events that will never be repeated in the same way. Psychology studies hope as an individual motive for human actions. According to Charles R. Snyder and his team, "hope is a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy), and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)" (Snyder et al., 1991, p. 287).

While sociology can profitably use these elements of knowledge in its analyses, its perspective is different. As Weber recalled, sociology typically deals with general phenomena, which can occur in different forms and conditions. In our case: the forms of hope, the individual and collective social actors who bring it about, the socio-historical conditions that encourage or depress it. The sociological perspective starts from concrete and unique historical phenomena, but it aims to identify *general concepts* that can help to understand various situations. From a comparativist and typological perspective, sociology aims at identifying "a common sociological stock" of hope—some "roots" or invariant phenomena found in different historical events (Desroche, 1979, p. 25).

In the light of these considerations, we believe that a programme of sociological analysis of hope can be divided into five closely connected questions.

Who are the Actors and Historical Bearers of Hope?

We have seen how sociological reflection has identified various subjects as historical bearers of hope. First, *charismatic leaders*, *i.e.*, those who, according to Weber, give rise to innovative historical processes, the new beginnings of history. Or *particular social groups or categories* that appear as the interpreters and historical bearers of hope: the *proletariat* for Marx, the *revolutionary party* for Lenin, or the *"best" intellectuals*, relatively free from ideological conditioning, for Mannheim. In the 1960s and 1970s, exponents of the Frankfurt school (Marcuse), and Marxist scholars

of the dependency theory (Amin, Gunder Frank, Dos Santos, Jaffe, etc.), crowned instead as bearers of hope the *external proletariat*, *i.e.*, the disinherited masses of the South, because they are free from the conditioning with which capitalism circles the industrial proletariat (by now gentrified) in the Western countries. We believe that pointing to a subject intrinsically endowed with the quality of bearer of hope may risk slipping into a kind of sociological mythology. Instead, it is more appropriate to investigate, case by case, who helms the processes of transition and historical innovation in specific socio-political and cultural contexts.

To Whom? Who are those Who Hope?

Are there people more predisposed to hope and to whom hope-bearing subjects can more easily turn or connect and find a listening ear? True, the psychological and personality characteristics of individuals influence their attitude towards hope – particularly open-mindedness, active imagination, and intellectual curiosity (McCrae & Costa, 1997). From a sociological perspective, however, we are interested in the *socio-cultural variables* that prompt people to hope, to be more receptive and attentive to proposals for innovation and change. Those who feel a sense of incompleteness and see goods to be obtained and goals to be achieved are inclined to hope. Weber observes that it is difficult for "satiated" people to hope because they have (or believe they have) everything they need or want (Alagna, 2011). This aspect has both an objective and a subjective-cultural dimension. The former entails having reached a condition of well-being, a high degree of power and wealth, and satisfactory professional goals. The latter means being content with one's status regardless of wealth and power (hence, Durkheim says that one can be happy or satisfied even if poor). Conversely, those who aspire to something more, who wish to improve their condition, are inclined to hope. Those who act are not necessarily those in a lower social status who "have nothing to lose", but rather those groups who see the possibility of an improvement in their position and have this desire frustrated or forestalled (Brinton, 1952). The subjective dimension is crucial: adhering to a value system that produces dissatisfaction with the present state (*e.g.*, with power differences in society, what Hofstede calls *power distance*) and pushes one to desire more. The point is not to have or not to have, but to want more. It is the position of early capitalist entrepreneurs, according to Weber, or of the bourgeoisie during the French revolution and the political-democratic revolutions.

What are the Main Socio-historical Forms of Hope?

In this brief excursus on the sociology of hope, we have encountered two main types: Mannheim's forms of utopia and Desroche's peaks and troughs of hope. These are interesting and suggestive attempts, rich in suggestions, but they certainly do not exhaust the possibilities of a systematic reflection on the different types and

categories of hope. We tried to indicate a typology of the forms of hope that would systematise the reflections of various authors.

We believe that a more comprehensive and explanatory typology should bring together three dimensions: hope—trust—responsibility (according to the different concepts that these three terms express).

What Social, Political, and Cultural Conditions Favour the Emergence and Strengthening of this Disposition?

Hope, like belief, can arise and acquire more strength in some socio-cultural contexts than in others. What social, economic, political (structural) and cultural conditions favour the emergence and strengthening of hope as a life attitude?

As far as the *objective-structural aspect* is concerned, we must consider the system of social stratification, whereby individuals have different access to social rewards: power, wealth, and prestige. It is a matter of assessing whether the system admits, favours, or discourages the possibility of horizontal and vertical social mobility; in other words, whether people can improve their social situation, as Dahrendorf points out when he speaks of the conditions for a "realistic" hope. For example, whether work skills or industriousness offer a real chance of improving one's position, or commitment to education and academic merit can favour vertical social mobility (Brint, 1998, chapp. 5–6).

Regarding the *cultural-symbolic aspect*, it is relevant to ask: what place does hope take in the general configuration of values of a society or culture? For example, Florence Kluckhohn (1950, 1953; Kluckhohn & Stroedtbeck, 1961) argued that every society is faced with fundamental value options and has a limited range of possible answers. Two of these options seem to have a direct bearing on hope: the view of human nature and that of time. As regards the former, some cultures and systems of thought (religions, mythologies, philosophies, ideologies) consider *human nature* fixed and unchangeable, while others deem it modifiable and perfectible. Concerning the *attitude towards time*, Kluckhohn observes that some cultures privilege the past and the values of tradition, while others live immersed in the present, attentive to its needs and possibilities; finally, others are projected towards the future (*e.g.*, societies that embrace the myth of progress). The social psychologist Shalom Schwartz (1999, 2004) attempted to sketch an overall picture of value options classified according to opposition and contiguity relations, comparing data collected in more than eighty countries. In Schwarz's table, an important contrast of values that directly concerns hope is that between *conservatism* and *openness to change*. On the one hand, there are *the values of the past and traditions*. Those who identify with them assign greater credibility to experience and ways of behaviour that imply continuity with the past. Innovations will be viewed with distrust as synonymous with uncertainty or adventurism. On the other hand, there are *the values of the future and innovation*. These come to the fore when the future is bathed in a positive light. Under this perspective, those who advocate and champion change, those who invoke the need to "keep up with the times" or "change things" are likeable and credible.

What are the Effects and Consequences on Personal and Social Life?

From Durkheim to Berger, sociologists have asked themselves: does hope help people live? Does hoping for a change (for the better) on a personal and social level contribute to creating favourable conditions for it? In sociology, the obligatory reference is to the Thomas' theorem and Merton's theory of the self-fulfilling prophecy. According to the former, "if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Thomas & Thomas, 1928, p. 572). For the latter, "The self-fulfilling prophecy is, in the beginning, a *false* definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the originally false conception come *true*" (1948, p. 195). This is true for both fear and hope; both when one dreads threatening and negative events (*e.g.,* Merton's famous example of the belief that a bank is defaulting) and when one expects positive and desirable events and situations. Believing and hoping in something because "it is good to believe" is not only a bias that bends reality to one's desires (wishful thinking) but can trigger a series of "active" effects that lead one to act in real life and engage with it. Believing or hoping has the power to transform reality. The fall of the Berlin Wall was one of these effects: thousands of people, wishing and believing in a better life, at the first confused and unconfirmed news that "East Germany is opening its borders" headed *en masse* towards the Wall (Legrenzi, 2008), peacefully overwhelming the border police who could not shoot the immense crowd that was gathering there.

Declarations

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