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Expectation and Hope in the Anthropocene

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I. Expecting

“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.”
--Hannah Arendt¹

A social scientist friend of mine, Holly Jean Buck, is six-months pregnant. She reports that she has both expectations and hopes related to the new arrival. The near-term expectations are obvious: it will be a human being, it will be female (they did an ultrasound), and it will have a discernible mixture of Buck’s racial and physical characteristics and those of her partner. Less certain but still likely enough to expect is that the baby will be healthy and right-handed and often crying and hungry.

Buck’s near-term hopes are about circumstances she desires and regards as possible but also as much harder to predict: that the birth will be natural rather than caesarean, that it will be quick and easy rather than long and painful, that the baby will be placid rather than colicky, and so on. There is also at least one point on which her near term expectations and hopes come apart: she expects that she will find nursing very irritating, but she hopes that she won’t.

Buck’s long-term hopes, by contrast, are harder to specify. She does admit to hoping that the baby will have a good life. Perhaps this is best articulated (in the words of the “Crown of the Good Life” project) as the hope that the child will live well, that her life will go well, and that her life will be marked by joy. For Buck, interestingly, this is another place where hope and expectation come apart: she says she *doesn’t* have the clear positive *expectation* that her daughter will have a good life. But why not?

Buck is a geographer who works on climate issues and policy. Her branch of social science is still dominated, she reports, by broadly-Marxist pessimism related to both economic and environmental issues. The term “Anthropocene” is used in these circles to refer to the period in natural history when human beings become so ubiquitous and dominant that they are themselves a geologic force.² It is a new and more evocative way of talking about the Weberian idea that our environment can become so “rationalized” and “disenchanted” that the line between technocratic reason and nature itself is blurred. In the dystopian narratives of the Anthropocene, the human being is replaced by “*homo consumens*, that other-than-human

¹ Arendt, H. *The Human Condition*, p. 9. For a nice study of Arendt on the topic of this paper, see Billings, D., “Nativity or Advent: Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Moltmann on Hope and Politics,” in M. Volf and W. Katerburg, eds., *The Future of Hope*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004.

² Or perhaps even more powerful than geologic forces -- Stewart Brand’s line in the final *Whole Earth Catalog* (1998) is often quoted in these discussions: “We are as gods and might as well get good at it.” For “forces of geology” see Holly Jean Buck, “On the Possibilities of a Charming Anthropocene,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, forthcoming 2015, p. 2.

assemblage of humans, technology, fossil fuels, and capitalist relations.”³ Some denizens of the Anthropocene might romantically think that they can be reenchanting simply by going out into “nature”: a drive in the countryside, a cruise through the fjords, a trip to a national park. But the countryside is full of domesticated animals and genetically modified crops that would never have grown on their own, true *wildlife* is hard to spy from the deck of a cruiseship, and the parks are trammled, policed environments where it is possible to get lost, perhaps, but not to experience *wild-erness* – a place away from human control, protection, surveillance.

Jürgen Moltmann sketched a vision like this back at the turn of the millennium, just as “Anthropocene” was first starting to be used in print by geochemists, biologists, anthropologists and geographers to characterize our new geological *Heimat*:

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.⁴

Buck joins some of her colleagues in expecting the Anthropocene to end badly via some combination of economic and environmental collapse. Some orthodox Marxists articulate a desire for this, or at least a desire for the this-worldly eschaton to follow, as hard as that eschaton is to conceive. Others play Lenin to their Marx and suggest that we should try to both conceive and deliver these changes ourselves in active, activist ways. One of those ways involves *not* conceiving and delivering in the biological way: in Ithaca, NY (where Buck and I live) it is easy to come across this in a bumper sticker sentiment: “Save the Earth, Don’t Give Birth.”

Just after Moltmann wrote his millennial reflections on “Progress and Abyss” and what he calls, following Bill McKibben, “the end of nature,” there was 9/11 and the other man-made miseries that followed. Even as the human world was gathering for another set of wars, Moltmann wrote these messianic reflections on “The Promise of the Child.”⁵ Similarly, even while studying the pessimistic apostles of the Anthropocene, Buck last year defied the bumper sticker sentiment and is now expecting. But again, one of the main changes she reports is that she finds it psychologically necessary to suspend or ignore her pessimistic long-term expectations, and instead focus on happier albeit less likely visions of the human future. This is what she calls, in a recent article, “the charming Anthropocene” -- where “charming” refers to a kind of “reenchanting” that we actively perform rather than seek outside ourselves in nature. She writes:

³ Szerszynski, B. “The End of the End of Nature: The Anthropocene and the Fate of the Human,” *The Oxford Literary Review* 34 (2), 2012, 165-84; this is from p. 175, quoted in Buck 2015, 2.

⁴ Moltmann, J. “Progress and Abyss: Remembrances of the Future of the Modern World,” in *The Future of Hope*, M. Volf and W. Katerburg, eds.

⁵ This is the first chapter of his 2003 book which was translated into English as *In the End – The Beginning*. London: SCM Press, 2004.

Hence, here is a question to begin with: 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?⁶

The question turns us away from the usual expectations regarding the “rapacious antagonist of the horror stories who has shaped environments in a variety of ways throughout history.” It is also meant to evoke hope for a less likely but still possible future in which “human traits like tending, altruism, creativity, art and craftsmanship, and cooperation reclaim their status as basic human nature.”⁷

I haven’t met too many people who self-identify as “millennials.” That generation is supposed to be the first in the global north most of whose members expect to live less *prosperously* (in the financial sense) than their parents. Buck may be a little too old to be a millennial, but she certainly expects this fiscal predicament for daughter, and doesn’t seem worried about it. This is the reverse of the “middle-class” assumption, characteristic of the Boomers as much as the 19th century bourgeoisie, that (in Moltmann’s words) “the all-important thing was social advancement from one generation to the next.”⁸

But, again, Buck finds that the psychology of expecting makes it difficult to focus on the long-term prospect that her daughter’s overall *life* (as opposed to just her social or financial situation) will be worse than that of parents. So she tries instead to focus on her near-term expectations and long-term “charming” hopes, while still avoiding naïveté:

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.⁹

These reflections on the advent of a particular child reveal important differences in the roles played by *expectation*, on the one hand, and *hope*, on the other, in the psychology of the adults involved. In my non-scientific surveys, most speakers of English seem to recognize these conceptual differences and use “expectation” and “hope” in the way I did above: “expectation” refers to a belief about something that one takes to be likely, whereas “hope” involves (at least) the belief that a state of affairs is possible and the desire that it obtain. Despite these clear contemporary distinctions, however, the concepts have a common Greek root – *elpis* – and are often conflated in classical and early modern philosophy. In what follows I will briefly survey the history of this classical conflation (Section II) before turning to two more expansive case studies in it. The first is Immanuel Kant’s effort to mount “moral proofs” for religious doctrines

⁶ Buck 2015, p. 2.

⁷ For another vision of the Anthropocene that includes both dystopian realism and hope (as well as sex and romantic love) see Bonnie Nadzam and Dale Jamieson, *Love in the Anthropocene*, New York: OR Books, 2015.

⁸ Moltmann, “The Promise of a Child,” p.7.

⁹ Buck 2015, p. 8.

that are supposed to go by way of an appeal to the conditions on rational hope (*Hoffnung*) but only turn out to be valid (I suggest) when they appeal instead to positive expectation (Section III). The second case study is David Kelsey's recent articulation of the kind of "eccentric hope" that Christian anthropology underwrites – this is a hope that, in Kelsey's own words, has more to do with confident "expectancy" than anxious yearning for possibilities (Section IV). I conclude in Section V with some brief reflections on whether and when mere hope (as opposed to expectation) might be religiously sufficient or even preferable.

II. A Classical Conflation

A. The value of having expectation/hope

It is not easy to locate *elpis* among the ancients. Or rather, it is easy to locate but it hard to see precisely what was made of it. The person credited as the first philosopher in the west, Thales of Miletus (634-546 BCE), is famous for seeking monistic kind-explanations – i.e. for arguing that all things are based in and reducible to one *kind* of thing. His hypothesis was that this kind (or element) is *water*. Thales also noticed, however, that when that water congeals and coagulates into human beings, another ubiquitous quality emerges. Asked what is the most common feature of human beings, Thales replied "*elpis*; for those who have it, often have nothing else."¹⁰

Thales's statement provides a clue as to why it is hard to locate the place of *elpis* among the ancients. Although they are aware of its prominence and power in human psychology, they also seem ambivalent about it, as though unsure whether to champion or discourage it. Hope is as ubiquitous as water among us, but it is most perceptible in those who are *deficient* in the other qualities that the Greeks esteemed – stable excellences of character, maturity, magnificence, and material fortune.

The myth of Pandora (whose name means "all-giver") highlights this ambivalence. As Hesiod tells the story, Pandora appears to humanity as a gift from the gods, though in fact she and her jar of evils are a punishment for Prometheus's hubris. Upon her advent on earth, Pandora opens the jar, and unnumbered curses fly out and begin their calamitous visitations upon humanity. One item, however, remains in the jar:

Only *elpis* was left within her unbreakable dwelling
it remained under the lip of the jar, and did not fly away.
Before [it could fly out], Pandora replaced the lid of the jar.
This was the will of shield-bearing Zeus the gatherer of clouds.¹¹

¹⁰ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans and ed. Tiziano Dorandi, New York: Cambridge 2013.

¹¹ Hesiod, *Works and Days*, lines 96-99.

Hesiod doesn't tell us why *elpis* is in the jar of curses in the first place, why it remained in the jar, and why Zeus wanted the all-giver to hold it back. The ambivalence about *elpis* in antiquity is reflected in this silence, and it has led to vastly different responses among commentators.¹² Some take it to indicate that *elpis* is the one consolation left to us in the midst of a life plagued by the other curses released upon humankind. Others agree that *elpis would* be a consolation, but that Zeus doesn't allow us to have it, urging Pandora to close it back up in her jar. Still others take the fact that *elpis* is in the jar in the first place to show that it is *itself* a curse, albeit a subtle one: it remains quietly behind, but ultimately inflicts the most pain of all. Thus Nietzsche: "In truth, it is the most evil of evils because it prolongs man's torment."¹³ Finally, some commentators argue that "*elpis*" in Hesiod is better translated as "expectation," and then argue about whether Pandora's final act is merciful or cruel: is she preserving us from false expectations, or does *elpis* remain behind not just to torment but also to deceive us?¹⁴

Other ancient authors manifest the same ambivalence. In the *Timaeus*, Plato presents a creation myth in which the immortals give us "anger that is hard to be appeased, and *elpis* which is easily led astray."¹⁵ In the *Laws* we're told that "in one and the same man are two foolish contending counselors -- pleasure and pain -- and of either he has anticipations which we call hope and fear."¹⁶ Diogenes Laertius quotes Aristotle's famously ambivalent description of *elpis* as the "dream of a waking man."¹⁷

The Stoics depart from the rest of the ancients in being more openly opposed to *elpis*. In a letter to Lucilius, Seneca quotes Hecato as saying that one should "cease to hope... and then one will cease to fear." By way of explanation, Seneca explains that

[a]s different as they are, the two of them march in unison like a prisoner and the escort he is handcuffed to. Fear follows along with hope. I am not surprised that they proceed in this way; both belong to a mind in suspense, to a mind in a state of anxiety by looking into the future. Both are mainly due to projecting our thoughts far ahead of us instead of adapting ourselves to the present.¹⁸

¹² A nice summary of these discussions is found in Verdenius, W.J., *A Commentary on Hesiod, Works and Days* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985).

¹³ Nietzsche explains his interpretation: "As Zeus wanted, Pandora slammed the top and it remained inside. So now man has the fortunate jar in his house forever and thinks the world of the treasure. It is at his service; he reaches for it when he fancies it. For he does not know that the jar which Pandora brought was the jar of evils, and he mistakes the remaining evil for the greatest good in the world. It is hope, for Zeus did not want man to throw his life away, no matter how much the other evils might torment him, but rather to go on letting himself be tormented. To that end, Zeus gives man hope." Nietzsche, F. *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches: Ein Buch für freie Geister*, 1878.

¹⁴ For a discussion of the debate regarding the translation of "*elpis*" here, see Leinieks, V., "*Elpis* in Hesiod, *Works and Days* 96," *Philologus* 128 (1984) 1–8.

¹⁵ Plato, *Timaeus* 69d.

¹⁶ Plato, *Laws*, Preamble, Book I.

¹⁷ Diogenes Laertius, *The Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Life of Aristotle, section IX.

¹⁸ Seneca, *Moral Letters to Lucilius*, vol. 1, letter 5 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1917).

Seneca's ultimate advice is to avoid both fear and hope by cultivating tranquility in the present -- "which alone can make no man wretched."¹⁹

This quick survey reveals that the contemporary distinction between *hope* and *expectation* was conflated in antiquity, as evidenced by the fact that "*elpis*" seems to apply to both. We have also seen that there is either ambivalence about or a negative evaluation of the state of having *elpis*. Because its object is something that has not yet obtained, is not yet possessed, is not yet known for certain, hope/expectation can console us in the context of suffering, and motivate us to take extraordinary risks. But it is not based in stable knowledge, it is often directed towards things we cannot control, and thus has an anxious aspect from which the Stoic mind, in particular, recoils.

b. The value of the objects of expectation and hope

In contemporary English, "expectation" is a close cognate of "anticipation" – it typically refers to the state of looking towards some event that is to come. The Latin root verb "*specto, spectāre*" means "to look" or "to look for" whereas "*ex-specto, expectāre*" adds the outward or forward motion of "ex" and can be rendered either "to look out for" or "to look forward to." These two glosses already indicate that the value of the *object* of the state can be either good or bad. More importantly, it can be *construed* by the subject as good or bad. I advise someone to "look out" for something that I take to be dangerous, but I also report that I am "looking forward" to something that is good. Likewise I might *expect* ice cream (good) at the end of my final meal, after which I *expect* my own execution (bad).

"Hope," on the other hand, takes an intentional object that the subject regards as good. It sounds infelicitous or even unintelligible to say, straightforwardly and without explanation, that I hope for something that I also regard as bad for me.²⁰ As we have seen, the Greek "*elpis*" is more like "expectation" than "hope" in this regard: it can take both apparent goods and apparent bads as its object. Aristotle speaks of those who hope for (*elpizousi*) evil for themselves as well as those whose "hopes are for a future good (*ton mellonton hai elpides agathai*)" (NE 9.4, 1166a15-25).²¹

In some cases, Aristotle makes the value of the object of *elpis* explicit by using modified phrases such as "expecting the good" (*elpizein agathan*) or "being full of good-expectation (*euelpis*)." But there are other cases in which we have to rely on context to determine the value judgment. In a well-known passage from the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle says that the youth "are easily deceived, because of the things just said (i.e. that they hope [*elpizousi*] easily)" (1389a24-25). Here the

¹⁹ Perhaps there is a hint of this Stoic doctrine in Moltmann's refusal to see the eschaton as something that is *only* future-directed, or in his insistence that the good life of a child has to be seen in its present rather than merely in what it might become ("The Promise of a Child," 6-7).

²⁰ The phrase "hope to die" is not, I think, an exception to this. It is either used by someone who has come to see death as a good, or it is used ironically (typically along with its usual companion phrase "stick a needle in my eye").

²¹ Gravlee, S. "Aristotle on Hope," 461.

object of the state in question is presumed to be good – that’s why the youth are easily attracted to and deceived by it. In passages from the ethical writings, likewise, Aristotle describes the bravado that is the sin of excess against courage and yet based in *elpis*. His point is that people who manifest such bravado (again, typically the young) do so because they hope for or expect the good right around the corner; their *elpis* is focused on the good. The true virtue of courage, by contrast, is most clearly manifested in the face of expected evil (*EE* 3.1 1229a19 and *NE* 3.8, 1117a10).²²

By the time of the New Testament, *neither* the state of having *elpis* nor the object of *elpis* is taken to be value-neutral: New Testament *elpis* is clearly a good state for a subject to have, and it is also clearly directed towards something that the subject takes to be good.²³ Because the object of “expectation” remains value-neutral (I can expect the worst, or expect my execution), translators typically render New Testament uses of “*elpis*” as “hope.”

Medieval and early modern authors follow the New Testament tradition here in taking hope to be directed towards an apparent good, while expectation can be directed towards either the apparent good or the apparent bad. These now seem to be settled distinguishing features of the two concepts.

c. The doxastic components of expectation and hope

So far we have seen that there is ambivalence in antiquity about the value of having *elpis*, whether or not it is directed at the good. We have also seen that there is some ambiguity about whether it can be directed towards the bad, and that this is resolved towards the end of the period.

A second ambiguity in the ancient discussion of *elpis*, however, survives into the early modern era. As we have seen, “*elpis*,” “*euelpis*,” and their cognates apply in ancient texts to states in which something is taken to be right around the corner, certain or likely to obtain. Thus Aristotle in the *Rhetoric* passage cited above says that “*elpis* for some sort of good is confidence” and can thus lead the youth astray (2.12, 1389a26-28).²⁴ In contemporary terms, we would call this expectation rather than hope.

Aquinas sounds much more contemporary than Aristotle on this topic when he says that the doxastic component of hope is the belief that its object is at least *possible*: “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.”²⁵

²² Gravlee, 462.

²³ See, e.g. *Acts* 26:7; *Romans* 4:16-25; 5:4; 8:22-25; 15:13; *1 Peter* 1:3; 3:15; *2 Thessalonians* 2:16.

²⁴ Gravlee, 466.

²⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a2ae. 40-44, my emphasis. Although I think he gets the modal claim right, we might wonder about Aquinas’s further claims that hope is only properly directed at what is “arduous” and “future.” I see no reason to think that hope can’t be directed at something relatively easy to acquire, or that it

Elsewhere he says that “hoping would be out of the question if the good that is hoped for did not appear possible.”²⁶

Despite Aquinas’s clarity on this score, blurriness about the doxastic component of hope persists. Calvin returns to the classical conflation: “hope is nothing else than the expectation of those things which faith has believed to have been truly promised by God.”²⁷ Hobbes calls hope “an appetite, with the opinion of attaining.”²⁸ The doxastic state here is mere “opinion” rather than full confidence, but “opinion of attaining” suggests that Hobbes still sides with Calvin over Aquinas in thinking that we count as hoping for something only if we think we are *likely* to attain it. Descartes says something similar about the doxastic component: “We consider whether there is much or little prospect that we shall obtain what we desire, and that which represents to us that there is much probability of this excites hope in us, while that which represents to us that there is little excites fear.”²⁹ And Locke defines hope as “that pleasure of the mind, which every one finds in himself upon the thought of a *probably* future enjoyment of a thing which is apt to delight him.”³⁰ Influenced by these and other canonical authors, the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites the following as the two primary meanings of “hope,” thus perpetuating the classical conflation:

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

Spinoza’s definition seems somewhat broader: “Hope is a joy not constant, arising from the idea of something future or past about the occurrence of which we sometimes doubt [. . .]. From these definitions it follows that there is no hope unmingled with fear.”³¹ Unlike Calvin,

cannot take the present or past as an object. For a defense of Aquinas on hope, see Jeffrey Hause, “Misconceiving Hope,” forthcoming. For a criticism, see Wolterstorff’s contribution to *The Future of Hope* (Volf and Katerburg, eds.)

²⁶ *ST* 2a2ae. 17,7.

²⁷ Calvin, J., *Institutes of the Christian Religion* II.2.42.

²⁸ Hobbes, T., *Leviathan: With Selected Variants from the Latin Edition of 1668*. Part I, chapter 6.

²⁹ *Passions of the Soul* 2.58.

³⁰ Locke, J., *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 2.20.9, my emphasis. One likely source of the ambiguity here is the fact that the concept of the “probable” as a function of *objective* tendencies or dispositions in the world was still evolving during this period. Huygens published the first textbook on probability in 1657, and Pascal’s wager argument is summarized at the end of the 1662 Port Royal *Logic*. In the subsequent century, many scholars were working furiously on the logic of probability, especially as the scholastic goal of demonstrative *scientia* in the natural sciences was abandoned in favor of the inductive, experimental knowledge that was being generated by scientific practice itself. Much of this work focused on statistical probability in nature and in games of chance, but the connection to epistemology was often explicit. Indeed, the concept of the “probable” inherited from the scholastics was originally epistemological: it meant something like “testified to by reliable authorities.” By the seventeenth-century, this scholastic appeal to the testimony of the authorities had largely been replaced with an appeal to the testimony of “signs” in nature, but the epistemological connection remained. The research program was so active that in 1736 Joseph Butler could claim that, from the point of view of rational assent, “probability is the very guide in life.” For more on all this, see Ian Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.

³¹ See Spinoza, *Ethics* book 3, d. 12,13. To “doubt about the occurrence” of something is to be unsure whether it did or will occur. So for Spinoza, at least, hope trades on uncertainty.

then, Spinoza thinks that the event or occurrence cannot be something of which we are certain – we “sometimes doubt.” But “doubt” might characterize a huge range of credences, and so “hope” can involve anything from the belief that a good is *almost* certain to occur to the belief that it is just barely possible. On this score, then, Spinoza is closer to Aquinas than he is to Hobbes, Descartes, or Locke.

The doxastic component Spinoza describes here is consistent with some forms of expectation too. We might think it is 95% likely to be sunny tomorrow, and thus expect (with joy) that it will be sunny, even though we also have some doubt. According to Spinoza, this expectation counts as hope. But Spinoza’s definition would not cover a “joy” or pleasure in the thought that something is *certain*. Although I *expect* that 2+2 will equal 4 tomorrow, this is not something for which I can Spinozistic hope. So the domains of expectation and hope are overlapping, but not coextensive.

With a few exceptions,³² contemporary philosophers distinguish the doxastic component of expectation from that of hope on the following grounds: hope takes an object that the subject regards as possible but not certain, whereas expectation involves the estimation that the state is more probable than not (and may even be certain).³³

d. The affective components of expectation and hope

In addition to belief about the possibility or probability of its object, hope clearly involves affect of some sort. Some philosophers think of the affective component as a desire or “appetite” (Aquinas, Hobbes), others refer to it as a kind of “pleasure” (Locke) or “passion” (Descartes).

As we have seen, Spinoza defines hope as a passion as well – an inconstant kind of “joy.” He views passions – and especially “inconstant” ones -- in a negative way: they play a key role in what he calls “human bondage.” Like the Stoics (and Plato) he also regards fear and hope as counterparts. If we assign something a very high value, but are uncertain whether it will obtain, we will feel joy at the prospect of its arrival and fear at the prospect of disappointment. If we don’t value it highly, we will have a lower-level kind of hope or fear about it. Either way these will be inconstant passions -- perturbations in what should be the serenity of a mind that has grasped the fundamental character of reality. Spinoza’s claim in Book Five is not the Stoic one that we should try to value only what is present or under our control. Rather, he advises us to acknowledge the *necessity* of present, past, and future, and thus abolish inconstant passions.³⁴

³² See J. Wheatley, “Wishing and Hoping,” *Analysis* 18, no. 6 (1958): 121–31.

³³ For a nice summary of contemporary positions, see Martin, A., *How we Hope: A Moral Psychology*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013.

³⁴ Perhaps there is a variety of fear that could accompany the idea of a necessary occurrence – death, for instance. But Spinoza has other therapies of the soul for dealing with that. See Pereboom, “Stoic Psychotherapy in Descartes and Spinoza,” *Faith and Philosophy*, 11 (4) (1994): 592-625.

Hume is closer to Spinoza than Locke on this score. He regards hope as a “direct passion” or emotion related to our subjective apprehension of probabilities: “When either good or evil is uncertain, it gives rise to fear or hope, according to the degrees of uncertainty on the one side or the other.”³⁵ The picture is that of a continuum from despair to joy, with fear and hope as intermediate positions that depend on the degree of probability we assign to the outcome. When we regard something as both good and very unlikely, we despair of it; when we regard it as good but uncertain, we oscillate between hoping for it and fearing that it won’t obtain. With the hope comes pleasure, with fear comes pain. When we regard the outcome as good and certain, we experience joy.³⁶

Contemporary linguistic usage indicates that the English term, anyway, doesn’t necessarily express affect. I may expect the mailman to arrive between 10 and 11 today and be completely unmoved by the thought. But it does seem that the noun “expectation” –like “anticipation” – carries affect when its object is left unspecified. “I have the expectation that the meeting will occur tomorrow” is emotionally flat. So is “we have every expectation that you will show up.” But “I am full of expectation” does seem to express a vaguely positive affect, or at least the anticipation of future affect (of joy or disappointment, depending on how things turn out).

III. Kant and the classical conflation

In the “Canon of Pure Reason” chapter towards the very end of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant tells us that all of his philosophical interests are united by three questions—“What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope?” In a 1793 letter to theologian C.F. Staüdlin, Kant makes it clear that the third question is the main topic of the philosophy of religion.³⁷ The question, he goes on to say, is “simultaneously practical and theoretical, so that the practical leads like a clue to a reply to the theoretical questions and, in its highest form, the speculative question.” More specifically, by reflecting on the practical fact that “something ought to happen,” we can make an “inference” about the “theoretical” events and states we can rationally hope for, even if we can’t *know* that they will obtain (*Critique of Pure Reason* [KrV] A805–6/B833–4).

Kant goes on to describe what he calls a “moral world”—a world in which virtue and happiness are perfectly proportioned. Our duty, he says, is to will that this world obtains *and* that we become worthy of great happiness (and are thus virtuous) within it. This claim, together with a version of his ought-implies-can principle, then underwrites a commitment to the real possibility of the moral world (KrV A807/B835). The inference, in short, is that we ought to will

³⁵ Hume, D. *Treatise of Human Nature* 2.3.9.

³⁶ As far as the doxastic component goes, Hume, like Spinoza, seems to view hope as attending any evaluation of the odds of a good outcome as between 0 and 1, and thus as overlapping (but not coextensive with) our contemporary concepts of hope and expectation in this regard.

³⁷ In the letter of May 4, 1793, he also says that he needs to add a fourth question—“what is the human being (*Was ist der Mensch*)?”—in order fully to characterize his own projects in philosophy (AA 11:420ff). We also find the four-question formulation in the Introduction to the Jäsche *Logic* of 1800 (AA 8:25).

the moral world, and so it “ought to happen.” But if it ought to happen, then it can happen – the moral world is really possible. This commitment to the real possibility of a moral world also licenses hope for its actuality:

[I]t is equally necessary to accept (*anzunehmen*) in accordance with reason ... that everyone has grounds (*Ursache*) to hope for happiness in the same measure as he has made himself worthy of it in his conduct, and that the system of morality is therefore inseparably combined with the system of happiness, though only in the idea of pure reason. (KrV A809/B837)

This is an odd phrase: “to accept that everyone has grounds to hope.” Given the context, it is clear this “acceptance” is the same as what Kant will elsewhere call “faith” (*Glaube*). What we must accept, then, is that everyone has grounds to *hope* for future happiness in proportion to his or her own virtue. In other words, we are not baldly accepting that there actually *is* a necessary connection between virtue and happiness; rather, we are taking on faith that such a connection is *really possible* and then earnestly hoping for its actuality—in our case as well as others’. Kant goes on from here to claim, contentiously, that God’s *actual* existence as well as a future life for the human soul are conditions of the possibility of such a connection, and thus that willing the moral law and a moral world requires faith in God and a future life (KrV A810–11/B838–9).

There are many ways to reconstruct Kant’s “moral arguments,” and he himself articulates them in different ways across different works.³⁸ One that I find particularly intriguing starts with our psychological capacity for “demoralization” and the role that hope plays in neutralizing it:

(1) It would be “demoralizing” not to be able rationally to hope that there is a moral order of the universe by which a just arrangement (i.e. a “moral world”) will come about, for then we would have to regard it as certain that the whole history of the universe will not be good on the whole, no matter what we do.

(2) Such demoralization is seriously morally undesirable, since it will have an enervating effect on the moral efforts of most finite human agents.

(3) Therefore, there is moral advantage for us in being able rationally to hope that there is a moral order of the universe.

(4) S’s hope that *p* is rational only if S has either knowledge or faith that *p* is really possible.³⁹

³⁸ See, for example, Hare, J., *The Moral Gap*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1997.

³⁹ For a defense of this premise, see my “Rational Hope, Moral Order, and the Revolution of the Will,” in *Divine Order, Human Order, and the Order of Nature*, Eric Watkins, ed. New York: Oxford, 2013.

(5) Therefore, there is a moral advantage in being able to have either knowledge or faith that a moral order of the universe is really possible.

(6) The existence of God provides the most adequate account of the *real possibility* of a moral order of the universe.

(7) Therefore, there is a moral advantage in being able to have either knowledge or faith that God exists.

(8) Knowledge of the existence of God is not available.

(9) Therefore, there is a moral advantage in being able to have faith that God exists.

(10) Therefore, other things being equal, faith that God exists is morally justified.

There is a lot to be said about this version of the moral argument. One prominent objection points out that there is an unwarranted modal leap between (4) and (7). (4) says that in order to be able rationally to hope for something, we must have knowledge or faith that it is really possible. But what is the condition of the possibility of the “moral world”? (6) asserts that the *actual* existence of a supreme being provides the best explanation of this modal fact.⁴⁰ The objection here is simply that God’s *possible* existence is also perfectly adequate to the task. As long as it is really possible that God exists, then it is really possible that the moral world exists as well. And that’s all we need in order rationally to hope for it.⁴¹

If this is right, and assuming for the moment that the rest of the argument works, then it looks like the conclusion should be revised to

(10’) Therefore, other things being equal, faith that God’s existence is really possible is morally justified.

I will return at the end to a brief reflection on whether faith in the possibility of some thing or state (and hope that it is actual) is sufficient for genuine religion. Here, however, it is worth noting that Kant himself seems, in the *Critique* and elsewhere, to switch freely between talking about hope (*Hoffnung*) and faith (*Glaube*). The question in the philosophy of religion is supposed to be “What may I hope?,” but by the end of Kant’s discussion, it is framed almost exclusively in terms of rational faith (*Vernunftglaube*). Interestingly, if we were to change the first premise in the argument so that it is about rational faith or expectation rather than rational hope, then Kant’s desired conclusion might be within reach. In other words, if the

⁴⁰ This is because only a supreme being could and would proportion virtue and happiness in this way. This premise requires more argument, however: why wouldn’t a karmic system, or a Marxist vision, etc. do just as well?

⁴¹ There may be some complicated and specifically Kantian ways of arguing that the gap between a commitment to the real possibility of one thing and the actuality of something else can be bridged. See my “Kant, Modality, and the Most Real Being” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 91, 2 (2009):157-192 as well as Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980.

premise said that avoiding demoralization requires not mere hope but rather full-blown *expectation* that the moral world obtains, then Kant's argument to God's *actual* existence might be valid.⁴²

The fact that he either didn't notice this or switches between talk of *Hoffnung* and *Glaube* in a rather fuzzy way here suggests, again, that Kant is an heir of the classical conflation between hope and expectation. The fact that it makes at least one version of his signature moral proof invalid suggests that he is also an *unwitting* heir of this conflation.

Again, there is more to be said about Kant's argument (as always) but I now want to turn to a contemporary author who, by contrast, *intentionally* blurs the line between hope and expectation in an effort to retrieve the ancient notion of *elpis* and apply it in an eschatological context.

IV. Kelsey and the classical conflation

In his monumental theological anthropology *Eccentric Existence*, David Kelsey discusses eschatology second – after the account of creation but before the account of atonement and salvation. The eschatological vision he articulates is tri-partite: First, God's unexpected promise of consummation (which gives us a sense of our "ultimate context") turns our day-to-day lifeworlds into "promising proximate contexts in which we live on borrowed time." Second, "personal bodies flourish in appropriate response to God relating to them." Finally, "the appropriate response to God relating to them in this mode is hope" (501). This sequence allows Kelsey to say that the ground of hope is not a philosophy of 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 based "solely in the actuality of God keeping God's promise" (504) – an actuality that we encounter in Jesus Christ.⁴³

That's the Son's role. The Father gets into the picture by being the giver or bestower of hope: like grace, hope is something that we are given, rather than a response that we generate ourselves. The fact that it is a gift from God becomes most obvious, subjectively, in desperate situations, but the fact obtains throughout. One immediately wants to ask, however: don't these two descriptions work against one another? In what sense is hope an authentic "response" on our part to God's promise if it is also produced in us *by* God?

⁴² More argument would be required to establish this, but it is worth noting that Adams frames his classic reconstruction of the argument from "demoralization" in this way. See R.M. Adams, "Moral Arguments for Theistic Belief," in C. F. Delaney (ed.), *Rationality and Religious Belief*. University of Notre Dame Press (1979)

⁴³ This is still a broadly Moltmannian vision, of course: hope plays an essential and central role in human flourishing, according to Kelsey, and this is even before we consider our need for redemption or atonement from sin.

This is where Kelsey appeals to the role of the Spirit. The “circumambient” Spirit, which is also characterized as a “gift” from the Father, draws us to respond in this way. But because the Spirit is as much *within* us as outside us, its work and testimony is not a violation of our integrity, agency, or personality. Indeed, Kelsey insists in a striking passage that the Spirit (unlike the Father and the Son) is not a person, that there is no “I-Thou” in the circumambient relations between Spirit and persons (506), and indeed that the relation we bear to the Spirit is “not even a personal relation” (ibid.). Whatever hackles this may raise among Nicene/Cappadocian sticklers, a clear advantage is that hope can then be viewed as at once a gift of the Father by way of the Spirit *and* a response on *our* parts to God’s promise.

So much for hope’s ground and origin: but what *is* this hope, and what are its objects? It turns out that the “hope” of contemporary parlance is too anemic for Kelsey’s purposes. As we have seen, when I say that “I hope the sun will be out tomorrow” I have some sort of positive affect towards the state’s occurrence – I regard it as both possible and good. But normally I don’t “get my hopes up” – I don’t have anything like an ongoing, occurrent, and powerful desire towards that possibility, and any desire I do have often has little effect on my behavior. Let’s call this weak kind of attitude “thin hope.” It involves a desire and a belief, but the desire may be quite weak and the belief is about mere possibility.

Kelsey clearly views thin hope as religiously insufficient – it is not an adequate response to the unexpected promise of consummation. *Eccentric hope*, as he characterizes it, is

1. An “attitude of expectancy that a good and desired transformation of our quotidian contexts, now actually begun, will be fully actualized.”
2. 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.”
3. “Joyous ... a certain glad hopefulness but not a gleeful hopefulness, a happy hope but not a euphoric hope.” A “cheerful confidence that is anything but complacency.”
4. “...a disposition to enact certain types of practices publicly.”
5. “...best defined as a personal bodies’ orientation that disposes them for enactments of certain practices in public proximate contexts.”

It is clear from these snippets that the doxastic component of hope is more robust than the belief that *p* is possible. Rather, eccentric hope seems to involve the belief that consummation is *inevitable* (“will be fully actualized”) or at least highly likely. This makes sense of Kelsey’s talk of the accompanying affective state as that of “joyous” or “cheerful confidence,” rather than a longing that might be accompanied by anxiety or fear of disappointment. It also makes sense of the claim that eccentric hope can motivate decisive action.

We see further evidence of this in Kelsey's comment on the Kierkegaardian notion of hope as a "passion for the possible." Kelsey objects to this formulation and claims that eccentric hope is *not* about what is merely possible but is "grounded in an actuality – namely the already inaugurated eschatological kingdom" (522). So the claims about the eschaton are grounded in the actuality of God's *promise* of consummation for all creation. We can also add in the additional information about Christ, his passion, and the resurrection: God has raised Christ and thereby introduced what Moltmann calls the *adventus* into our present situation and creaturely *futuram*. In one place Kelsey says that "Jesus is in his person the actualization of the eschaton, the end and goal of the project of human subjectivity's full self-actualization" (95).

The fact that God promises consummation for creation *as a whole* underdetermines the details in such a way that eccentric hope might still seem to overreach. For, as many traditional theologians have emphasized, it isn't clear that consummation for *all* of creation entails flourishing for *each individual*. So unless I've lost all the usual attachments to this particular personal body, I may still find some uncertainty in a promise of consummation for all creation, an uncertainty that will give my attitude the character of hope rather than joyful expectation.

St. Bonaventure offers an illuminating example here. In article 26 of his *Commentaries* he describes a view according to which hope is the appropriate response to our inability to find a syllogism that takes us from the faith-based expectation of general consummation to the faith-based expectation that this will involve *my* flourishing as well.

For just as Augustine says, through faith man believes all good people finally to be saved, and from this has a kind of certitude. Through hope, he [also] has a kind of certitude (*quandam certitudinem*), but through hope he has confidence *that he himself should be saved (per spem autem confidit, se esse salvandum)*. It is from this *general* faith that he believes [in the general consummation], hoping through hope to *apply it to himself*.⁴⁴

The idea here is that someone may have a confident expectation (in faith) regarding creation or the "all good people," and yet not be able to infer that the promise will also apply to *himself* as an individual personal body. On the latter score, he is left not with faith but with "hoping against hope."

In Kelsey's discussions of hope, by contrast, there is the sense that the syllogism from faith-to-faith can be made: we can go from an expectation regarding all of creation to an expectation regarding each one of us. But while I'm as sympathetic to universalism as anyone, I worry that removing *all* of the subjective uncertainty about the individual appropriation of the promise threatens to dispatch anything that looks like genuine hope. Just as it abuses ordinary language to say "I know that it's impossible, but I'm still hoping for it!" I think it does violence to our

⁴⁴ Sentence *Commentaries* 3.26.1.5, my emphasis. Bonaventure himself goes on to reject the view that he is sketching here, and says that a form of the syllogism is possible.

linguistic scheme if we say “I have the certain expectation, through faith, that my personal consummation is inevitable, and yet I’m still hoping for it!”

Kelsey explicitly wants to distance himself from Hegel, Marx, and Ernst Bloch with respect to eschatological hope, and of course he’s not either a determinist or a utopian regarding the future. But in the end his confident “expectancy” about God’s promise and his focus on the already-actual aspect of it makes the ultimate divine *adventus* seem just as inevitable as Marx’s revolution. Its immediate application to every individual also threatens to make ordinary kinds of “hope” look out of place.

In short, Kelsey rehabilitates the classical conflation. If eccentric hope is just a joyous expectancy of a flourishing for each one of us, then it is not really hope at all, but rather *already* the faith which is the substance of the things we *might* have hoped for.

V. The Role of Unconflated Hope

“The whole domain of the supernatural is thus removed from the region of belief into that of simple hope, and in that, for anything we can see, it is likely always to remain.”

-- John Stuart Mill

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 true religion is the rational belief that God is really possible and that if he did exist, then he would command the moral law (AA 28:998; AA 6:153–4, and note). Some commentators read this as articulating an appealingly low standard for religiosity, since even an agnostic or perhaps a certain kind of atheist could achieve it.⁴⁵ Others view it as articulating an appallingly low standard for religiosity, one which is inadequate to characterize authentic religious faith.⁴⁶

Perhaps we can bring these competing perspectives a little closer by emphasizing, in conclusion, that Kant’s point is that rational religion requires only *one* “practico-dogmatic” article of belief⁴⁷—namely, that God’s existence is really possible. But a life that is passionately oriented around this belief may still involve a sophisticated complex of other attitudes, desires, and affections—including *hope* for the actual existence of God, the consummation of creation, and even extramundane assistance for the individual—that would not fit well within a baldly atheistic framework.

Here in the Anthropocene, it might also involve hope for the advent of a new kind of human being – not mere *homo consumens* but rather one that actively works to turn our geologic

⁴⁵ Wood, “Rational Theology, Moral Faith, and Religion,” 405–6. See also Muyskens, J. *The Sufficiency of Hope*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1979, chapter 7.

⁴⁶ See “Introduction” and other contributions to Firestone and Palmquist, *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion*.

⁴⁷ For this phrase, see the *Fortschritt* essay of 1792-3, AA 20:305ff.

Heimat into something “charming” again. This is in sympathy with Moltmann’s point that “every child is also a new occasion for hope for the home of life in this unredeemed world” (17).

My best guess is that the attitudes that many so-called “believers” as well as sympathetic agnostics or “non-believers” take towards religious doctrines are more complicated than talk of belief, partial belief, or degrees of belief would capture. Indeed, I suspect many of the *rational* attitudes involved aren’t doxastic at all, and that when they are they don’t go far beyond Kant’s “minimum of theology.” One of my reasons for worrying about the classical conflation here is that it impoverishes our picture of authentic religion by eliding the differences between hope and belief (where “expectation” is just the belief that something is likely or certain to occur). It also puts authentic religious life out of reach for a lot of us – most forms of expectation are not under our direct control, and it’s not clear that even Pascalian/Jamesian therapies can be counted on to help. By contrast, it seems much easier to ease ourselves liturgically into the bare belief that these things are possible (that’s the doxastic side of hope), and then cultivate the yearning, passionate affective side that would make this hope significant and life-orienting even if not fully eccentric.

A methodological coda: if hope can be the centerpiece of a good and genuinely *religious* life in this way, then philosophers of religion might do well to follow theologians, psychologists, and geographers and broaden our focus a bit. For the past forty years or so, there has been a tendency to focus on the idealized case of theistic belief (justified, warranted, or entitled), or at least to construe rational religion as crucially involving such belief. This focus threatens to depict those who don’t find themselves able to *believe* certain doctrines or *expect* certain events as second-class citizens of the *civitas dei*.⁴⁸ A philosophy of religion that seeks to analyze real-world religious adherence rather than a doxastic ideal, however, would go beyond *epistemology* and into *pistology* and even *elpistology* (with apologies for the latter terms). Such a turn in philosophy of religion would aptly be called “liturgical” because it would look to actual religious practice—and especially the hopeful “as if” practices found in ritual *leitourgia*—in an effort to understand the kinds of attitudes (and their justification conditions) that are involved in religious *faith* more broadly construed.

In sum: by denying expectation in order to leave room for hope (i.e. by not conflating the two), we honor the reasonable, liturgical, and genuinely religious form of life that is still available to those who aren’t able, for whatever reason, to be true believers. We also highlight some intriguing cross-disciplinary directions for future philosophical research.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ See my “Epistemology for Saints,” *Books and Culture*, March/April 2002 (<http://www.booksandculture.com/articles/2002/marapr/10.20.html>)

⁴⁹ For more on this theme, see my “Liturgical Philosophy,” in *Essays in Honor of Marilyn McCord Adams*, S. Williams and T. Ward, eds., in preparation.